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HISTORICAL INTERVAL.

1. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 1997; 278: 1039-1044.

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THE

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HISTORICAL INTERVAL

BETWEEN THE

OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS;

ILLUSTRATING THE FAITHFULNESS OF GOD TO HIS PEOPLE, THE
FULFILMENT OF PROPHECY, ETC. ETC.

Designed chiefly for the Use of Young Persons.

BY THE

AUTHOR OF "A SPONSOR'S GIFT."

LONDON:

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PICCADILLY.

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C. Whittingham, 21, Tooks Court,
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HISTORICAL INTERVAL

BETWEEN

THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS.

INTRODUCTORY LETTER.

MY DEAR ROBERT,

Among the books I lately sent you was one containing a series of letters on the Church Catechism,* and other subjects connected with your profession as a member of the Church of Christ. Though not in the first instance addressed to you, I trust you will consider them as especially intended for your use, as my godson, mentioned in the first of them. I hope you will read them with earnest prayer to Almighty God, that, by the influence of his Holy Spirit, they may be conducive to the good of your immortal soul. It is now your turn to be addressed; and, as I am not likely to have frequent opportunities of conversing with you, I shall adopt the epistolary mode of writing; because it will subject you to the reading of only a distinct portion at one time, and also give you opportunities of proposing questions, or offering remarks on the subjects I shall recommend to your notice. I was much pleased to

* A Sponsor's Gift.

observe, in my late visit, that you have a sincere and ardent desire to improve in the various studies you are pursuing; but more particularly was I gratified to find that you are not negligent as to the "*one thing needful*," as to the attainment of that knowledge by which you may become "*wise unto salvation*." Your daily private reading of the word of God is a practice so likely to prove of everlasting import, that I trust nothing will ever prevail on you to relinquish or intermit it. The letters I mentioned may be useful to direct you in this profitable study; and I shall be always ready to afford you any other assistance in my power. Your knowledge of ancient history is doubtless extensive; because, in the course of your classical studies, it is almost continually presented to your attention. But profane history is not the most ancient, any more than it is the most important: these two qualities are combined in sacred history alone; in the history of God's people contained in the Bible. I have furnished you with a chart of ancient history, which will assist you in a collation of the two branches, sacred and profane; and in order to carry you forward in the pursuit, I now propose to direct your attention to that period wherein the character of inspiration no longer distinguished the records of the Jewish nation; to that period which forms a connexion between the history and prophecies of the Old Testament, and the wonderful events and fulfillments recorded in the New Testament. It will be your part, my dear boy, to decide whether my efforts be useful and acceptable in this instance: if they prove so, I shall very likely extend them to other subjects connected with your spiritual improvement. But let us remember that no efforts on my part, nor application

thy years can be profitable without the blessing of God's Holy Spirit to direct, enlighten, and sanctify us; guiding our hearts and lives in the way of God's precepts, and bringing our souls to an entire confidence in his mercy through Christ the only Saviour. That you may have grace to seek this inestimable blessing, and that my endeavours may be made profitable to you, is the sincere prayer of

Your very affectionate,
&c. &c.

of whom

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LETTER II.

MY DEAR ROBERT,

In order to afford you a concise and clear account of the events which befell the Jews during their captivity in Babylon, and after their return from it, I shall go back to the reign of Jehoahaz, the immediate successor of Josiah, King of Judah; for, though there is much of their subsequent history contained in the Bible, it is either blended with the writings of the prophets and rulers, or related by the apochryphal writers, in such a manner as to lose the clearness and continuity which are needful to render history intelligible to young minds. I presume you are well acquainted with the history of the kings of Israel and Judah; if not, I would advise you to study it in the Bible itself. Your Chronology of the Bible will help you in tracing the successions, and the Key I lately sent you will direct you to the chapters in which the several reigns are recorded. The destruction of Jerusalem, and the captivity of Josiah, had long been foretold by the prophets; yet

neither the people nor their kings (with the exception of Hezekiah and Josiah) paid any attention to the merciful warnings of Almighty God; they continued to live in the neglect of his ordinances, and in rebellion against his laws; although his threatenings against Israel had already been fulfilled in the desolation of that kingdom, and the carrying away of the ten tribes by the Assyrians. In the reign of Josiah we see a revival of religion, as to its external rites, and the extinction of idolatry, as far as the power of this pious and excellent monarch could effect them. But the hearts of the people were unreclaimed, and therefore the Lord, while approving the conduct of Josiah, and for his sake deferring the threatened ruin, declares, nevertheless, that his fury is not turned away, but that his arm is stretched out still. "Behold, saith the Lord, I will bring evil on this place, and upon all the inhabitants thereof: even all the curses that are written in the book which they have read before the king of Judah." The death of Josiah, at Megiddo, hastened the completion of this awful prediction. The people of Judah made his son, Jehoahaz, king instead of his father, though the reason of their choice is difficult to conceive, for he was not the eldest son; and, as to his character, that is portrayed in few words, "He did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his fathers had done." His reign, however, was short; for Pharaoh Necho having obtained a signal victory over the Babylonians, near the river Euphrates, made himself master of Carchemish, a considerable city in that neighbourhood, and, having established a garrison there, proceeded to the subjection of Syria and Palestine. During his march he was informed

that Jehoahaz had assumed the government of Judah, which he already regarded as a conquered kingdom. He therefore summoned the new made king to Riblah, in Syria, and on his arrival caused him to be put in chains, and sent captive to Egypt, where he died. He had reigned only three months. Pharaoh soon after this came to Jerusalem, where he made Eliakim, another son of Josiah, king; on condition of his paying an annual tribute* of a hundred talents of silver, and a talent of gold. Pharaoh changed the name of this prince to Jehoiakim. A change of names was frequently made by conquerors, as a proof of their absolute power over the vanquished;† but the change here made was only in sound, both words having the same signification. It is supposed, by some divines, that Pharaoh thus ascribed his conquest to Jehovah, by whom he had declared himself to be sent.‡ Neither these humiliating circumstances, nor the fate of his unhappy brother, seem to have had any effect on Jehoiakim, for he too “did evil in the sight of the Lord his God,” and his people were but too willing to follow his example, though they also began to share in his degradation: as he taxed the land in order to raise the tribute money. The Lord God did not even now forsake this perverse remnant of his people Israel; he continually warned them by the voice of his prophets.§ Jeremiah tells us that he prophesied from the thirteenth year of Josiah, to the carrying away of Jerusalem captive, in the eleventh year of Zedekiah; and several other prophets are mentioned in the course of the history, whose predictions

* (2 Chron. xxxvi. 3.) 52,200*l.* of our money.

† See 2 Kings xxiv. 17; Daniel i. 7.

‡ 2 Chron. xxxv. 21.

§ See Jeremiah xxi.

neither the people nor their kings (with the exception of Hezekiah and Josiah) paid any attention to the merciful warnings of Almighty God; they continued to live in the neglect of his ordinances, and in rebellion against his laws; although his threatenings against Israel had already been fulfilled in the desolation of that kingdom, and the carrying away of the ten tribes by the Assyrians. In the reign of Josiah we see a revival of religion, as to its external rites, and the extinction of idolatry, as far as the power of this pious and excellent monarch could effect them. But the hearts of the people were unreclaimed, and therefore the Lord, while approving the conduct of Josiah, and for his sake deferring the threatened ruin, declares, nevertheless, that his fury is not turned away, but that his arm is stretched out still. "Behold, saith the Lord, I will bring evil on this place, and upon all the inhabitants thereof: even all the curses that are written in the book which they have read before the king of Judah." The death of Josiah, at Megiddo, hastened the completion of this awful prediction. The people of Judah made his son, Jehoahaz, king instead of his father, though the reason of their choice is difficult to conceive, for he was not the eldest son; and, as to his character, that is portrayed in few words, "He did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his fathers had done." His reign, however, was short; for Pharaoh Necho having obtained a signal victory over the Babylonians, near the river Euphrates, made himself master of Carchemish, a considerable city in that neighbourhood, and, having established a garrison there, proceeded to the subjection of Syria and Palestine. During his march he was informed

army that the Rechabites took shelter in Jerusalem; where their conduct is made the subject of exhortation by God to his disobedient people.* This same year (the fourth of Jehoiakim) Jeremiah foretold the taking of Jerusalem, by Nebuchadnezzar at this time, and the captivity which should ensue and last seventy years. God now commanded Jeremiah to write on a roll, or parchment, all the prophecies he had spoken, from the time of his appointment to the prophetic office; and to send Baruch to read them in the temple on the great day of atonement. It does not appear that any resentment was expressed against Baruch while performing this command; but his reading of the prophecies seemed to have no effect in bringing the people to repentance. Shortly after this Nebuchadnezzar marched into Judah, and laid siege to Jerusalem. In less than two months he succeeded in taking the city, and having bound Jehoiakim in fetters, intended to carry him to Babylon. But Jehoiakim humbling himself, and consenting to become tributary to the king of Babylon, was restored to his liberty and replaced on his throne. Nebuchadnezzar at this time caused great numbers of the people to be sent captives to Babylon; he also took some of the vessels from the house of the Lord, and sent them to be placed in the temple of his idols. Among the captives were many sons of the nobles, and several princes of the royal family, whom Nebuchadnezzar desired his officers to select, that they might serve in his palace at Babylon: Daniel and his three companions, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, were of the number of the princes. The whole nation being thus brought into subjection, the

* Jeremiah xxiv.

were probably not written, or, at least, have not come down to us. Habakkuk and Zephaniah also prophesied at this period.* Such, however, is the deceitfulness of sin, such are the wiles of the tempter, that transgressors are either lulled in a false security, and so infatuated that no danger can arouse them to reflection; or they are hardened in their crimes, and not only determine to persist in their mad career, but disdain remonstrance, and wreak their vengeance on the messengers of God. The king and people of Judah had arrived at this degree of guilt and wretchedness. On the one hand they were deceived by the false prophets, who promised them deliverance and peace; and, on the other, they not only refused to hearken to God's prophets, but even persecuted and killed them. Jeremiah, preserved by God, who raised up Ahikam to protect him, was not put to death, but Urijah,† another prophet, was brought out of Egypt, whither he had fled, and put to death by the merciless Jehoiakim, in the beginning of his reign. In the third year of Jehoiakim, Nabopolassar, king of Babylon, perceiving that by the loss of Carchemish he had lost Syria and Palestine also, determined to reduce them again to his authority. But, as he was now too old to undertake this expedition in person, he sent his son, Nebuchadnezzar, to conduct it, having previously made him his associate in the empire. In the following year this prince defeated the Egyptian garrison at Carchemish, and, as a consequence of this victory, soon obtained possession of Syria and Palestine. It was on the approach of his

* Zephaniah i. 1. Habakkuk does not specify the time of his prophesying, but it is inferred from his speaking of the Chaldeans.

† Jeremiah xxvi. 20—23.

army, that the Rechabites took shelter in Jerusalem; where their conduct is made the subject of exhortation by God to his disobedient people.* This same year (the fourth of Jehoiakim) Jeremiah foretold the taking of Jerusalem, by Nebuchadnezzar at this time, and the captivity which should ensue and last seventy years. God now commanded Jeremiah to write on a roll, or parchment, all the prophecies he had spoken, from the time of his appointment to the prophetic office; and to send Baruch to read them in the temple on the great day of atonement. It does not appear that any resentment was expressed against Baruch while performing this command; but his reading of the prophecies seemed to have no effect in bringing the people to repentance. Shortly after this Nebuchadnezzar marched into Judah, and laid siege to Jerusalem. In less than two months he succeeded in taking the city, and having bound Jehoiakim in fetters, intended to carry him to Babylon. But Jehoiakim humbling himself, and consenting to become tributary to the king of Babylon, was restored to his liberty and replaced on his throne. Nebuchadnezzar at this time caused great numbers of the people to be sent captives to Babylon; he also took some of the vessels from the house of the Lord, and sent them to be placed in the temple of his idols. Among the captives were many sons of the nobles, and several princes of the royal family, whom Nebuchadnezzar desired his officers to select, that they might serve in his palace at Babylon: Daniel and his three companions, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, were of the number of the princes. The whole nation being thus brought into subjection, the

* Jeremiah xxiv.

were probably not written, or, at least, have not come down to us. Habakkuk and Zephaniah also prophesied at this period.* Such, however, is the deceitfulness of sin, such are the wiles of the tempter, that transgressors are either lulled in a false security, and so infatuated that no danger can arouse them to reflection; or they are hardened in their crimes, and not only determine to persist in their mad career, but disdain remonstrance; and wreak their vengeance on the messengers of God. The king and people of Judah had arrived at this degree of guilt and wretchedness. On the one hand they were deceived by the false prophets, who promised them deliverance and peace; and, on the other, they not only refused to hearken to God's prophets, but even persecuted and killed them. Jeremiah, preserved by God, who raised up Abikam to protect him, was not put to death, but Urijah,† another prophet, was brought out of Egypt, whither he had fled, and put to death by the merciless Jehoiakim, in the beginning of his reign. In the third year of Jehoiakim, Nabopolassar, king of Babylon, perceiving that by the loss of Carchemish he had lost Syria and Palestine also, determined to reduce them again to his authority. But, as he was now too old to undertake this expedition in person, he sent his son, Nebuchadnezzar, to conduct it; having previously made him his associate in the empire. In the following year this prince defeated the Egyptian garrison at Carchemish, and, as a consequence of this victory, soon obtained possession of Syria and Palestine. It was on the approach of his

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* Jeremiah xxxv.

apparent in his conduct. His confederate Pharaoh Neebo had died the preceding year.

Jehoiachin next succeeded to the government of Judah. This prince, called also Jeconiah and Coniah; was the son of Jehoiakim. In the 2nd Book of Chronicles, chap. xxxvi. he is said to have been *eight* years old when he began to reign, while in the 2nd Book of Kings we are told he was *eighteen*. Divines reconcile these two accounts, by concluding that his father associated him in the government when only eight years of age: a custom very prevalent in those times. Jehoiachin followed the example of his father; but his career of impiety and vice was short, for Nebuchadnezzar now came in person against Jerusalem, and besieged the city in form. In the twenty-second chapter of Jeremiah, to which I have already referred you, there is a prediction so remarkable for its clearness, and the circumstantial manner in which it was accomplished, that I cannot forbear copying it for you; though I have every reason to hope that you always seek the passages of scripture to which I direct your attention. The Lord, speaking to Jehoiachin by his prophet, says, "I will give thee into the hand of them that seek thy life, and into the hand of them whose face thou fearest, even into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, and into the hand of the Chaldeans. And I will cast thee out, and thy mother that bare thee, into another country, where ye were not born, and there shall ye die." This is the prophecy; and its fulfilment was literal, as we read in the 2nd Book of Kings xiv. 12-15; for Nebuchadnezzar pressing the siege, and Jehoiachin having no means of escape or defence, the city was reduced in three months; and the king, with

all his family, household, and nobles, surrendered themselves prisoners of war, and were carried captives to Babylon. It is a circumstance worthy of observation, that Jehoiachin and his mother are mentioned together in the narrative,* as they had previously been in the prediction. Nebuchadnezzar at this time despoiled the temple of the vessels and treasures he had spared on his first visit, and seized all the treasures of the king's house also. The number of captives he now carried away amounted to several thousands, consisting not only of the higher classes and the remains of the army, but of all the carpenters, smiths, and artificers he found in Jerusalem and Judah, whom he intended to employ in the buildings he was carrying on at Babylon. The prophet Ezekiel who was among the captives; whenever he speaks of the captivity, reckons from this era. He was a priest when carried away, and was not called to the prophetic office till four or five years after. Jehoiachin, by surrendering himself to the king of Babylon, retarded the destruction of his capital, and escaped immediate death; but his lengthened life was no great advantage to him, since he was not allowed even the slender comfort of personal liberty in his degradation and exile, being kept in prison during the remainder of Nebuchadnezzar's life, a period of thirty-seven years. Thus were the Lord's threatenings executed upon him; he was indeed "a man that did not prosper in his days;" and it is much to be feared that adversity and chastisement had no salutary effect in leading him to repentance.

Nebuchadnezzar having thus subjected the kingdom of Judah, and sent the principal inhabitants of it into

* 2 Kings xxiv. 15.

neither the people nor their kings (with the exception of Hezekiah and Josiah) paid any attention to the merciful warnings of Almighty God; they continued to live in the neglect of his ordinances, and in rebellion against his laws; although his threatenings against Israel had already been fulfilled in the desolation of that kingdom, and the carrying away of the ten tribes by the Assyrians. In the reign of Josiah was seen a revival of religion, as to its external rites, and the extinction of idolatry, as far as the power of this pious and excellent monarch could effect them. . . But the hearts of the people were unreclaimed, and therefore the Lord, while approving the conduct of Josiah, and for his sake deferring the threatened ruin, declares, nevertheless, that his fury is not turned away, but that his arm is stretched out still. "Behold, saith the Lord, I will bring evil on this place, and upon all the inhabitants thereof: even all the curses that are written in the book which they have read before the king of Judah." The death of Josiah, at Megiddo, hastened the completion of this awful prediction. The people of Judah made his son, Jehoahaz, king instead of his father, though the reason of their choice is difficult to conceive, for he was not the eldest son; and, as to his character, that is portrayed in few words, "He did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his fathers had done." His reign, however, was short; for Pharaoh Necho having obtained a signal victory over the Babylonians, near the river Euphrates, made himself master of Carchemish, a considerable city in that neighbourhood, and, having established a garrison there, proceeded to the subjection of Syria and Palestine. During his march he was informed

that Jehoshaz had assumed the government of Judah, which he already regarded as a conquered kingdom. He therefore summoned the new made king to Babel, to Syria, and on his arrival caused him to be put in chains, and sent captive to Egypt, where he died. He had reigned only three months. Pharaoh soon after this came to Jerusalem, where he made Eliakim, another son of Josiah, king, on condition of his paying an annual tribute* of a hundred talents of silver, and a talent of gold. Pharaoh changed the name of this prince to Jehoiakim. A change of names was frequently made by conquerors, as a proof of their absolute power over the vanquished;† but the change here made was only in sound, both words having the same signification. It is supposed, by some divines, that Pharaoh thus ascribed his conquest to Jehovah, by whom he had declared himself to be sent.‡ Neither these humiliating circumstances, nor the fate of his unhappy brother, seem to have had any effect on Jehoiakim, for he too “did evil in the sight of the Lord his God,” and his people were but too willing to follow his example, though they also began to share in his degradation: as he taxed the land in order to raise the tribute money. The Lord God did not even now forsake this perverse remnant of his people Israel; he continually warned them by the voice of his prophets.§ Jeremiah tells us that he prophesied from the thirteenth year of Josiah, at the carrying away of Jerusalem captive, in the eleventh year of Zedekiah; and several other prophets are mentioned in the course of the history, whose predictions

* (2 Chron. xxxvi. 3.) 52,200*l.* of our money.

† See 2 Kings xxiv. 17; Daniel i. 7.

‡ 2 Chron. xxxv. 21.

§ See Jeremiah xxii.

captivity; ~~made~~ Mattaniah; a younger son of Josiah, and uncle to Jehoiachin, king over the residue of the people. He exacted from this prince a solemn oath of fealty and subjection to him; and changed his name to Zedekiah, which signifies *the Justice of the Lord*; intending thereby to remind him of the punishment he might expect from God if he violated his law, by departing from this engagement.

Thus ended the second war of Nebuchadnezzar against the Jews; he had conducted it by his lieutenants and governors of the neighbouring provinces during three years; in the fourth year he came in person to follow up the advantages they had obtained: We are not told why he did not come sooner, but it is probable that he was engaged in settling the affairs of his kingdom, after his father's death. It is said that he had been called upon as arbitrator in a difference between two neighbouring states, the Medes and Lydians, about this time. A war had been carried on between them with various success during five years; when collecting all their forces they met in a battle which they expected would prove decisive. But while victory was yet undetermined, an eclipse of the sun awed the combatants on both sides, and they came to an agreement to refer the matter of dispute to arbitration. The king of Cilicia on the part of the Lydians; and the king of Babylon on that of the Medes; soon brought about a peace between them, which was further strengthened by a mutual family alliance. Antyages, son to the king of Media, married Ariena, daughter to the king of Lydia, and from this marriage was born the year following, Cyaxares, whom Daniel calls Darius the Mede.

Asdyages had a daughter named Mandane by a former marriage; this princess was espoused by Cambyses, king of Persia, and I have no doubt you remember her as the mother of Cyrus, to whom she gave birth in the last year of Jehoiakim, king of Judah.

These circumstances, therefore, are not so unconnected with our history as they at first appear. On the one hand we see Nebuchadnezzar made the instrument of upholding an apparently inconsiderable state, from which, nevertheless, was to proceed a new empire, that should totally subvert his own. On the other hand, we see the Lord, "in judgment remembering mercy," and while inflicting chastisement on his rebellious people, raising up a deliverer for them in the person of Cyrus, whom he had called by name more than a hundred years before his birth.*

LETTER IV.

WE are now to enter upon the eventful and interesting reign of Zedekiah, the last king of Judah: eventful, as it leads to the final overthrow of that degenerate kingdom; and peculiarly interesting, from the display of the long suffering and tender forbearance of Almighty God towards this impenitent and perverse remnant of his people. Zedekiah's character, as portrayed by the writer of the 2nd Book of Kings, is, that "he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, according to all that Jehoiakim had done." There are other traits also mentioned in the 2nd Book of Chronicles, to which we shall advert as the history unfolds them. The

* Isaiah xliv. 28.

events of this reign are briefly narrated in the last chapters of the abovementioned books; but it is in the writings of the prophet Jeremiah that we find a detailed account of them, related with all the tenderness peculiar to this faithful messenger of God, this distinguished lover of his country. We may well suppose that Jeremiah bewailed the calamities he witnessed at the carrying away of Jehoiachin; and sympathized with those of his countrymen who were doomed to captivity. The Lord, however, made known to him in a vision,* that he ought rather to lament for those who were left in the land: as sufferings more terrible, and judgments more fatal awaited them; while they who were carried into Babylon were removed "for their good," that they might be preserved, and eventually restored to the possession of their land, and to the favour of their God. This circumstance shows us in an impressive manner that the best men are but short sighted, when they form judgments respecting God's providential dealings with themselves or others; as they frequently in these cases "call evil good, and good evil." We should always remember that the Lord can educe good out of "seeming evil;" and that he has promised to *make all things work together for good, to them that love him.*

When Nebuchadnezzar had left Jerusalem, and Zedekiah was settled in his kingdom, ambassadors arrived from the neighbouring princes of Ammon, Moab, Edom, Sidon, and Tyre, either to congratulate him on his accession, or to engage him in a confederacy against the king of Babylon, whose yoke they probably designed to shake off. Jeremiah by the command of God made for himself bonds and yokes, and

* Jeremiah xxi.

put them on his neck.* In this abject state he appeared before the ambassadors, and delivered to each of them this typical prediction of servitude; accompanied by a declaration from the Lord God, that he had given their several countries into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar; and had ordained that they should remain in subjection to him, to his son, and his son's son, till the time appointed for the end of his empire. To this declaration the Lord added promises of peace and safety to those who confided in it; but denounced destruction and misery to all who, by renouncing their allegiance to the king of Babylon, should disregard it. Jeremiah spoke also to Zedekiah, urging the message of God upon him; and entreating him not to be persuaded by the false prophets. This expostulation seems to have had the desired effect; as the king did not at that time enter into the confederacy. About this time a false prophet, named Hananiah, publicly addressed Jeremiah in the temple, speaking as in the name of the Lord, and declaring that in two years God would restore all the captives and all the treasures taken to Babylon; and deliver the land from the dominion of Nebuchadnezzar. Jeremiah in reply testified his hearty desire that the Lord might do according to the words of Hananiah. The false prophet, to give weight to his prediction, took the yoke from the neck of Jeremiah, and breaking it, declared, in the name of the Lord, that in like manner should the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar be broken. Jeremiah then withdrew; but he was speedily sent back, to denounce the Lord's anger against Hananiah; and to inform him that he should "be cast off from the face of the earth, and should die that very

* Jeremiah xxvii.

year; because he taught rebellion against the Lord, who had not sent him." This prediction was shortly after verified; as Hananiah died in less than two months. It was not only in Jerusalem that the people were deluded by these pretended prophets; Ahab and Zedekiah, two Jews among the captives at Babylon, had so much influence with their countrymen, as to prevent their making any settlement in the land of their captivity, by promising them a speedy return to their own land. Jeremiah was commanded to write a letter,* and send it by the ambassadors whom king Zedekiah sent to Nebuchadnezzar; the purport of which was, to assure the captives that their return would not take place before seventy years; to command them to settle themselves submissively and peaceably in Babylon; to warn them against the delusions of false prophets; and to show them how much better their condition was than that of the people who still remained in Jerusalem. The letter concluded by a special prediction of fearful punishment to Ahab and Zedekiah, which was soon accomplished; for Nebuchadnezzar, discovering that they interrupted his plans for settling the captives, caused them to be burnt alive. Some of the captives were greatly displeased at the letter Jeremiah sent them; and one, named Semaiah, wrote by the ambassadors to the priests and people at Jerusalem, urging them to punish the prophet. Zephaniah the priest read this letter to Jeremiah, who was immediately inspired by God to pronounce a severe judgment upon Semaiah.† In the fourth year of Zedekiah the Lord revealed his purposes respecting Chaldea and Babylon, and the judgments he would inflict upon them by the Medes

* Jeremiah xxix.

† Ibid. 24—32.

and Persians.* Jeremiah was commanded to write them in a book, which he was to send to Babylon by Seraiah, commanding him to read it on the banks of the Euphrates, and when he had finished reading, to fasten it to a stone and cast it into the river, saying, "Thus shall Babylon sink, and shall not rise from the evil that I shall bring upon her."

In the fifth year of Zedekiah, God, in great mercy to his people in captivity, raised up a true prophet among them; for it was at this time Ezekiel began to prophesy. This year is also remarkable for the death of Cyaxares, king of Media, and of Psammis, king of Egypt; the former was succeeded by his son Astyages, and the latter by his son Apries, whom the sacred writers call Pharaoh Hophrah.

The prophet Ezekiel was commanded by God to warn the people at Babylon against the idolatry of their countrymen at Jerusalem; and to declare to them the judgments impending over that devoted city.† In the seventh year of Zedekiah the prophet had a circumstantial revelation of these judgments: God making known to him by types and declarations the destruction of the city, the flight of Zedekiah, his pursuit, imprisonment, and death at Babylon.‡ King Zedekiah, as well as his subjects, was but too fatally hastening the execution of God's righteous visitations. In this same year he sent ambassadors into Egypt, to negotiate an alliance with Pharaoh Hophrah; and the year following, regardless of his oath, he openly rebelled against the king of Babylon. This, by the sacred historian,§ is considered as an effect of the obduracy of his heart;

* Jeremiah i. li.

† Ezekiel viii.—xi.

‡ Ezekiel xii.—xx.

§ 2 Chron. xxxvi. 13,

which, by his long continuance in sin, and his neglect of the warnings of God's prophets; was now become so great, that he presumptuously violated his oath to Nebuchadnezzar, "who had made him swear by God."

The king of Babylon was not tardy in his measures for reducing his rebellious tributary; for, having collected a large army, he marched towards Palestine. Finding, however, that the Ammonites also were engaged in the confederacy, he consulted his diviners to know which of the rebellious states he should first chastise.* The lot, by divination, fell upon Judah; and Nebuchadnezzar marching his army directly into that country, soon reduced all the cities except Lachish, Azekah, and Jerusalem. The Jews, terrified at his approach and success, now thought of turning to the Lord their God for deliverance, and entered into a covenant to keep his laws, and serve him alone. They also made a proclamation to set at liberty all slaves who were Hebrews, and whom, contrary to the law of God,† they had detained in bondage more than six years. This reformation, however, was merely external, and cannot be called repentance; it was no more than the terror of the wicked, excited by immediate danger, and consequently suspended, as we shall see, when that danger appeared more remote. Towards the end of the year, Nebuchadnezzar, with all his army, encompassed the city of Jerusalem; and on the same day (the tenth of the tenth month) God made this event known to Ezekiel at Babylon, with further particulars of the destruction in which this siege should terminate.‡ The

* Ezekiel xxi. 18—22. See also Note A.

† Deut. xv. 12.

‡ Ezekiel xliiv.

Lord also informed the prophet that he should suddenly lose his wife by death that night, but that he should not make any mourning for her; * thereby intimating to the Jews that the city they delighted in, which David emphatically called "The joy of the whole earth," should come to sudden destruction; yet that their personal calamities should be too great to allow them to mourn for her. In the beginning of the tenth year of Zedekiah God sent Jeremiah to tell him that Nebuchadnezzar would take the city, and burn it with fire, and that he should be taken prisoner, and sent to Babylon, where he should die, though not by the sword. † There is a very remarkable passage in this prediction: Jeremiah says, "*Thine eyes shall behold the eyes of the king of Babylon;*" and we are told by Josephus, that Zedekiah would not believe the prophecy, because it seemed to him inconsistent with that of the prophet Ezekiel, wherein he had said, that the king should "*not see Babylon.*" ‡ The sequel, however, fully reconciled the two predictions, and afforded a lamentable proof of the fallacy of human reasoning, when employed in opposition to the word of God. Zedekiah not only disregarded the message of God at this time, but, like his impious brother, sought to punish the messenger, for he caused Jeremiah to be imprisoned; thus proceeding from one act of impiety to another, till he filled up the measure of iniquity which was bringing destruction on himself and his people. The sacred historian § mentions as one of the sins of Zedekiah, that he "humbled not himself before Jeremiah the prophet speaking from the mouth of the Lord;" and then, after enume-

* See Note B.

† Jeremiah xxxiv. 1—7.

‡ Ezekiel xii. 13.

§ 2 Chron. xxxvi. 12—16.

rating the sins of the priests and people, and dwelling on the mercy and long suffering of the Lord, he tells us that the infatuated prince and his subjects persisted in their obduracy "*till there was no remedy.*"

LETTER V.

WHILE Jeremiah was in prison the word of the Lord came unto him, to tell him that Hanameel, one of his kinsmen, would come to propose his buying a field in Anathoth.* This accordingly came to pass, and Jeremiah, without hesitation, made the purchase, observing all the required forms, and directing Baruch to preserve the title deeds in an earthen vessel, that they might continue many days. He then declared, in the name of the Lord, that there should be a restoration, when "houses and fields and vineyards should be possessed again in the land." When he had concluded this business, the prophet made a beautiful prayer to God, in which, it would seem, he humbly asks the reason why God had commanded him to make a purchase, when the whole land was already in the hands of the enemy. The Lord graciously vouchsafed to answer him by a full declaration of his purpose to redeem his people from the land of their captivity, and to bring them back to their own land, where they should serve him, and "bring the sacrifice of praise into the house of the Lord." Nor was this the only solace Jeremiah had at this period, when his personal afflictions, though great, were doubtless absorbed in contemplating those of his devoted

* Jeremiah xxxii.

country. The Lord further revealed to him his gracious designs respecting the everlasting covenant, and renewed the promise he had made to David, that the Saviour should descend from him.* Christ is here called the "Branch of righteousness," and "The Lord *our righteousness*;" titles truly consoling to the prophet, who was commissioned to declare the deceitfulness and desperate wickedness of the human heart, and who was himself a witness of the dreadful ravages made by sin, even in this world. While Nebuchadnezzar was carrying on the siege of Jerusalem, he was informed that Pharaoh Hophrah was advancing with a large army to the assistance of Zedekiah. He therefore raised the siege, in order to meet and engage this new enemy; but previously sent all his prisoners, who amounted to more than eight hundred, to Babylon. The hopes of Zedekiah seem to have revived on the departure of the Chaldeans, for he sent to Jeremiah to inquire of the Lord, and to pray for him and his people. The Lord's answer by Jeremiah informed the king that his confidence in the Egyptian forces was vain, as they would return to their own country without achieving any thing for him, and that his expectations of deliverance in any way were no less vain, as his enemies would shortly renew the siege, take the city, and burn it with fire.†

The people of Jerusalem were even more sanguine than their prince. The departure of the assailants not only allayed their fears, but awakened their presumption also; for, breaking through the restraints they had lately imposed on themselves, they obliged the slaves whom they had liberated to return again to their former bondage.‡ While thus regardless of their solemn covenant,

* Jeremiah xxxiii. † Jeremiah xxxvii. 3—10.

‡ Jeremiah xxxiv. 11—22.

they violated the law of God, the prophet Jeremiah was sent to tell them, that since they had refused to give liberty to their brethren, as they had sworn to do, the Lord himself would proclaim liberty to the sword, to the pestilence and to the famine, and bring them to utter destruction. Jeremiah being now at liberty, and seeing no prospect of being useful to his countrymen, was desirous of retiring to Anathoth, his native place. With this intention he was about to pass one of the gates of the city, when he was seized by Irijah, a captain of the guard, who accused him of intending to desert to the enemy; and, regardless of his protestations to the contrary, brought him before the princes, who caused him to be closely imprisoned.* The Egyptian army, as the Lord had predicted, returned into Egypt; for Pharaoh, finding that Nebuchadnezzar was advancing to meet him, did not stay to risk a battle, but precipitately retreated, leaving his miserable ally to bear the whole weight of that resentment he had so readily helped him to incur. For this breach of faith on the part of Pharaoh, the prophet Ezekiel was commanded to pronounce a threatening of God's judgments upon Egypt,† which, in the course of this history, we shall see fully executed.

The retreat of the Egyptians left Nebuchadnezzar at liberty to carry on the war in Judah, which he did by returning to Jerusalem, and besieging it more closely than before. Zedekiah, now convinced of the faithless desertion of Pharaoh, and probably impressed by the fulfilment of Jeremiah's late prediction, sent for him out of prison, and held a private conference with him, inquiring if there were any word from the Lord.‡ The

* Jeremiah xxxvii. 11—15. † Ezekiel xxix. 1—7.

‡ Jeremiah xxxvii. 16—21.

prophet briefly informed him that he was ordered to confirm the former declaration of God, that he should be delivered into the hands of the king of Babylon. Reminding him of the false prophets, who had declared that Nebuchadnezzar should not come against Jerusalem, he expostulated against the injustice of his imprisonment, and obtained a mitigation of his sentence: the king ordering him to be kept in the court of the prison, with a daily allowance of bread while any remained in the city. The siege being now carried on with great vigour, Zedekiah sent messengers to Jeremiah, desiring him to inquire of the Lord whether, according to his former mercies, he would not now afford some signal deliverance to his people.* The Lord answered by his prophet, that he would not only refuse them assistance, but would render all their means of defence abortive; and would moreover send pestilence, in addition to the famine and the sword, to destroy all who remained in the city. Yet he made a way of escape for all who chose to trust in his word, by declaring that whoever gave himself up to the enemy should have his life spared. When the messengers of Zedekiah brought him this answer, it gave such offence to some of the princes who were present, that they represented Jeremiah as one who dispirited and discouraged the soldiers and people, and requested that he might be put to death.† The king immediately gave him up to them, but they did not think proper at that time to kill him, therefore contented themselves by thrusting him into a loathsome dungeon, where they probably intended to abandon him to a lingering death. The Lord however did not abandon his servant, for he raised up a

* Jeremiah xxi. 1—10.

† Jeremiah xxxviii. 1—13.

friend for him in the person of Ebed-melech, an officer of the king's household, who having heard what the princes had done, went immediately to the king, and represented the cruelty and injustice of their conduct. Zedekiah, whose enmity towards the prophet was now abated, and who had unwillingly given him up to the turbulent princes, ordered Ebed-melech to take thirty men, and deliver Jeremiah from his perilous situation. This command was gladly executed; and the prophet, once more placed in safety in the court of the prison, was commissioned to deliver a message of mercy from the Lord to Ebed-melech.* Shortly after this, Zedekiah sent for Jeremiah secretly into the temple, and having sworn to him that he would neither cause him to be put to death, nor give him up to the malice of the princes, inquired if there were any means of deliverance.† The prophet informed him that the Lord allowed one alternative by which the city might be saved from destruction: if he would deliver himself into the hands of the Chaldeans, the calamities impending over himself and his people would thereby be averted. Zedekiah expressed his fear of being exposed to the ill treatment of those Jews who had already gone over to the enemy; but the prophet assured him that no such danger awaited him, and earnestly besought him to embrace this last offer of mercy, at the same time enumerating the dreadful consequences of his rejecting it. The king could not be prevailed on to follow this counsel; he merely enjoined the prophet to keep the whole matter secret from the princes, and then sent him back to the court of the prison, where he remained till the city was taken.

* Jeremiah xxxix. 15—18.

† Jeremiah xxxviii. 14—28.

In the eleventh year of Zedekiah, the prophet Ezekiel was commanded to pronounce the threatenings of the Lord against Tyre,* whose inhabitants exulted in the miseries of Judah and Jerusalem; and to inform them that their triumph would be soon at an end; as destruction awaited them also from the same hand by which he had brought it on his own people. The prophet was also commissioned to repeat this year another prophecy against Egypt and her allies; in which Nebuchadnezzar is named as the instrument of its accomplishment.† Zedekiah, continuing to disregard the last intimation of God's mercy, was soon given up to the destruction that awaited him. The enemy without continued to press the siege; and a more fatal enemy within rendered the defence of the city impracticable; for the sacred historian informs us that, "in the fourth month, in the ninth day of the month, the famine was sore in the city, so that there was no bread for the people of the land." The king now came to the desperate resolution of attempting to escape by night; and, with the remains of his army, contrived to pass the besiegers; or to get out by some way unknown to them, on the north side of the city, towards the plain of Jordan. But what security is there for those whom the Lord hath forsaken? or what possibility of escape from his righteous judgments? "Hath he said, and shall he not do?" Zedekiah found, too late, that he could not flee from the presence of the Lord; for the enemy, apprised of his departure, soon pursued and overtook him in the plains of Jericho; and, his army being scattered from him, he was taken prisoner by the Chaldeans, who immediately conveyed him to the king of Babylon,

* Ezekiel xvi. xvii. xviii.

† Ezekiel xxix.—xxvii.

then at Riblah. Nebuchadnezzar immediately brought the captive king to trial,* and passed a sentence on him which accorded with the refinements of cruelty practised by the idolatrous nations. For having caused his sons to be slain in his presence, he afterwards deprived him of sight, and sent him to perpetual imprisonment in Babylon. Thus were the separate predictions of Jeremiah† and Ezekiel‡ awfully fulfilled. The eyes of Zedekiah indeed beheld the king of Babylon; and he was actually carried to Babylon without being able to see it!

What reflections does the history of this unhappy prince suggest! what lessons does it teach us! When we see how he withstood every means which God provided for his deliverance; how fatally he listened to the flattering delusions of the false prophets, and the more flattering suggestions of his own deceitful heart; let us fear for ourselves, lest we fall into a greater condemnation, by rejecting a greater deliverance; by yielding to the maxims or example of a world that lieth in wickedness; or by hearkening to the delusions of our spiritual enemy, through the suggestions of an evil heart of unbelief. Let us continually pray to be preserved from the danger of leaning to our own understandings. Let us entreat the Lord, by his Spirit, to keep us through faith unto salvation.

* 2 Kings xxv. 6, 7; Jeremiah lii. 9—11.

† Jeremiah xxxiv. 3.

‡ Ezekiel xii. 13.

LETTER VI.

Soon after Nebuchadnezzar had disposed of his royal captive, he sent Nebuzar-adan, the captain of his guards, to Jerusalem, to destroy the city.* This officer having collected all the vessels and treasures of the temple, and of the king's house, with whatever he found valuable in other houses, caused the city and temple to be set on fire; and, not content with this mode of destruction only, ordered the walls, fortresses, and buildings of every kind to be razed to the ground; leaving nothing but desolation and ruin to declare the fearful judgments of God for the apostacy of his people. Nebuzar-adan, having utterly destroyed Jerusalem, made captives of all the people he found there; Seraiah, the chief priest, Zephaniah, the second priest, several officers of the king's household, and other persons of distinction, to the amount of seventy, he carried to Riblah, where Nebuchadnezzar caused them to be put to death.† Nebuzar-adan, having thus disposed of all who might have had power or inclination to rebel in future, left some of the peasantry to be husbandmen and vine-dressers, over whom he appointed as governor Gedaliah the son of Ahikam.

The prophet Jeremiah was not personally involved in this general ruin; for the captain of the guard on his first coming to Jerusalem sent, by order of the king of Babylon, to the court of the prison, and taking him thence, committed him to the care of Gedaliah. Both

* 2 Kings xxv. 8—10; 2 Chron. xxxvi. 19; Jer. lii. 12—14.

† Jeremiah lii. 24.

Nebuchadnezzar and the captain of the guard seem to have been acquainted with the office and the predictions of Jeremiah; for the former gave particular orders concerning his safety;* and the latter conversed with him on the judgments with which the Lord had visited his people for their sins.† The prophet was conducted as far as Ramah, on the way to Babylon, with the other captives, but Nebuzar-adan there giving him the choice of a comfortable residence in Babylon, or the privilege of remaining in the land of Judah; he preferred the latter, and returned to Gedaliah, who had fixed his residence at Mizpah. This choice of the prophet was doubtless the effect of his patriotism. He saw the little remnant of his countrymen left without spiritual instructors, and he probably hoped to be made useful to them; while attachment to the place which had been so eminently distinguished by the presence of the Lord, in his sanctuary, made him unwilling to abandon it. His pathetic lamentations over the beloved city sufficiently evince the poignancy of his grief at the ruin he witnessed.

Some of Zedekiah's troops who had fled from him when pursued by the Chaldeans, and had concealed themselves till Nebuchadnezzar was returned to Babylon, hearing that Gedaliah was made governor of the land, repaired to Mizpah, where they were kindly received by him. Such of the Jews also as had fled to the neighbouring countries during the war, now returned to the land of Judah, where, from the prudence and mildness of Gedaliah, they seemed to have the prospect of dwelling in peace and safety.‡ This prospect, however, was soon

* Jeremiah xxxix. 11.

† Jeremiah xl. 2, 3.

‡ Jeremiah xl.

darkened, and the reviving hopes of the little remnant completely disappointed by the treachery of an individual. Among the captains of the forces, who had returned, was Ishmael, the son of Nethaniah, who was of the royal family of Judah. In concert with Baalis, king of Moab, Ishmael had formed a conspiracy to kill Gedaliah, and seize the government for himself, very probably in the expectation of being made king. This plot was by some means made known to the other captains, who apprised Gedaliah of it; and one of them, Johanan, the son of Kareah, offered to frustrate the execution of it by killing Ishmael. The amiable and unsuspecting Gedaliah not only rejected this interposition, but refused to credit the assertion, and still admitted Ishmael to the familiar intercourse he had always allowed him. This confidence, which might have softened a less atrocious character, was abused by Ishmael, and rendered subservient to his wicked purposes. For being invited to an entertainment by Gedaliah, he, with the assistance of ten men, treacherously murdered him and all the Jews who were with him, as well as the Chaldeans whom he found at Mizpah. This dreadful transaction was not as yet discovered, when eighty mourners, on their way to Jerusalem with offerings, approached towards Mizpah. Ishmael and his associates, expecting now to be discovered and overpowered by numbers, went forth to meet them, and affecting to partake of their grief for the national calamities, enticed them into the city, where they slew them all except ten, and cast their bodies into a pit or reservoir. Without loss of time Ishmael next made captives of all who remained in Mizpah, among whom were the daughters of Zedekiah, and carried them away

towards the land of Ammon. In the meantime, intelligence of these events having reached Johanan, the son of Kareah, and the other captains, they went immediately in pursuit of Ishmael, whom they overtook by the Lake of Gibeon. The people who had been forcibly carried away, rejoiced greatly at the approach of their deliverers; and immediately leaving Ishmael, put themselves under the protection of the captains. The mercenary, thus forsaken by his unwilling followers, escaped by flight, and with his chief associates took refuge among the Ammonites.

The murder of Gedaliah and of some of the Chaldeans terrified the captains, who concluded that Nebuchadnezzar, when informed of the matter, would send and destroy all who remained in the land. Their first impulse, therefore, was to flee into Egypt; and for this purpose, instead of returning to Mizpah, they took up their abode for the present near Bethlehem-Ephrata. The prophet Jeremiah being still among them, the captains and all the people besought him to pray for them; and to inquire the will of the Lord concerning them; solemnly promising to abide by it, whether consonant to their present inclinations or otherwise. Ten days after, the Lord vouchsafed them an answer by his prophet, forbidding them to go into Egypt, and promising to give them favour in the sight of Nebuchadnezzar, that he might be merciful to them, and not inflict the chastisement they feared.* The Lord also promised to "build them and not cast them down," to "plant them and not pluck them up," if they would remain in the land; but if they persisted in going into Egypt, the evils they feared should certainly overtake them

* Jeremiah xlii. 7—19.

there, till they should be utterly consumed. The princes and people had not been sincere in their promise of obedience; yet they did not openly retract it, but only pretended to disbelieve that the counsel of Jeremiah was dictated by the Lord: ascribing it to the influence of Baruch, the son of Neriah. Johanan, who had taken the chief command, and all the other captains, with most of the people, being of one mind, immediately proceeded on their way towards Egypt, forcibly taking such as were unwilling to accompany them, among whom we may certainly reckon Jeremiah and Baruch. When they came to Tahpanhes in Egypt, the Lord commanded Jeremiah to declare that Nebuchadnezzar should make himself master of the land of Egypt with as much ease as "a shepherd putteth on his garment," and that when he came he would inflict the Lord's final judgments on this disobedient remnant.†

In the twelfth year of king Jehoiachin's captivity, the prophet Ezekiel was informed, by one who had escaped from Jerusalem, of the dreadful events which had taken place in the final destruction of that city. He was hereupon inspired to foretel the judgments and ultimate ruin that would overtake those who were yet left; and the utter desolation which the Lord would bring upon the land because of their abominations.‡ The Jews who had fled into Egypt, and settled themselves at Migdol, Tahpanhes, and Noph, and in the country of Pathros, no way intimidated by their late chastisements, or the Lord's threatenings against them,

Jeremiah xlii. 20, to xliii. 7.

† Jeremiah xliii. 8—13.

‡ Ezekiel xxxiii. 21—29.

gave themselves up to the grossest idolatry. The forbearance and long-suffering of the Lord, notwithstanding these provocations, still allowed his prophet to expostulate with them. But, alas! such are the overwhelming effects of presumptuous sins, that the people now not only refused to *obey*, but even to *hearken* to the voice of God; telling Jeremiah they were resolved to persist in their idolatrous worship, and ascribing their late calamities to a temporary relinquishment of it. The Lord's answer by Jeremiah conveys the most awful threat his justice can set before a sinner, that of being utterly given up to his own ways. "Behold, I have sworn by my great name, saith the Lord, that my name shall no more be named in the mouth of any man of Judah, in all the land of Egypt, saying, The Lord God liveth." The Lord moreover confirmed his former predictions of the temporal calamities that should overtake them; declaring that he would watch over them for evil, and that they should ere long be convinced of the reality of his threatenings by the irremediable execution of them. After this there is no further mention of the prophet Jeremiah; therefore we may conclude that the Lord removed him from a state of suffering and sorrow to an abode of everlasting peace and joy. He had been favoured with such lively views of the glory and duration of the Messiah's kingdom, as were calculated to sustain him amidst the cruel persecutions of his countrymen, and the more poignant distress of witnessing their ruin. His writings are distinguished by the pathetic tenderness which pervades them; and his conduct displays a mild but firm adherence to duty, unimpaired by discouragements, unappalled by sufferings. Under the

sustaining influence of divine Grace, his character seems to have gained strength by the trials he endured, and the disappointments he experienced: affording a remarkable fulfilment of that gracious promise, "As is thy day so shall thy strength be."

LETTER VII.

I HAVE a great pleasure in calling your attention from the scenes of impiety and consequent ruin which lately engaged our notice, to the contemplation of an object the most lovely our world can afford: the life and pattern of a child of God, devoted from early youth to his Heavenly Father; the example of a believer, living up to his privileges, and enjoying communion with his God, during a long career of eminence and usefulness. After this introduction it will be almost superfluous to tell you that I am about to perform my promise of sending you some remarks on the character of the prophet Daniel. In the fourth year of Jehoiakim, as you probably remember, Daniel, with some other princes of the royal family of Judah, was sent to Babylon by order of Nebuchadnezzar, to be instructed in the language and science of the Chaldeans, that they might be fit to serve the king in any stations to which he should appoint them. What Daniel's previous education had been we are not informed; but we may conclude, that during his childhood he had enjoyed, under the reign of Josiah, the benefit of religious instruction. He was certainly one of those whom the Lord sent "into the

had of the Chaldeans for their good;"* and it is evident that his early youth had remained uncontaminated by the example or luxury of the vicious and idolatrous court of Jehoiakim. The first point of view in which his character comes before us is as noble as it is exemplary; it is indeed that which may be regarded as the foundation of his future eminence in piety, his ~~own~~ self-denial.

Distinguished by an engaging person and a fine understanding, he was brought to Nebuchadnezzar's palace, where doubtless every luxury of abode and habilitment was afforded him; and we are told that his daily portion of food was appointed to be "of the king's meat, and of the wine which he drank." These luxuries, however, too generally desired, and too favourably appreciated by young people, had no power of fascination for Daniel. Independent of their naturally pernicious effects, he had another motive which induced him not only to refuse, but to abhor them; for the provisions furnished at the king's table were frequently such as had been offered to idols, or were in other respects forbidden by the law of God, and "Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself by partaking of them."

Not satisfied with the mere desire of avoiding evil, he made immediate application to Ashpenaz, the officer to whose government the king had committed him, and with whom he was a distinguished favourite, begging that he might not defile himself. Ashpenaz was willing to grant his request, but expressed his fear of the king's displeasure, should his appearance be less healthy than that of other children of the same rank; adding,

* Jeremiah xiv. 6. "The children of the land shall say, We will not build a temple for the Lord, for we have been forsaken of the Lord our God."

that his own life might be endangered by the result of such an experiment. Daniel forbore to urge his request; and had he been less sincere, his scruples might have been appeased by this difficulty. But though disappointed, he was not discouraged, and the ardour of his wish suggested another method by which it might be gratified without any risk to Ashpenaz. He entreated Melzar, who had the immediate superintendence of him and his three companions, to feed them on pulse during ten days, giving them only water to drink, and at the expiration of that time to judge by their appearance whether the indulgence might be continued or not. Melzar complied with this reasonable request, and at the time appointed, finding that "their countenances appeared fairer and fatter in flesh" than those of all the children who fed on the appointed provisions, he continued to *indulge* them with *pulse* and *water*. We are not expressly told that this arrangement was made known to Ashpenaz, but I think it cannot be doubted that he was informed of it. Daniel's character was already too noble to allow of his obtaining, by sinister means, a favour which had been unwillingly refused. The Lord "had brought Daniel into favour and tender love" with Ashpenaz before the request was made; it is therefore reasonable to conclude that the youth himself informed his kind friend how safely it might be complied with. The early virtues of Daniel and his youthful companions are the more remarkable, as being extremely rare. Self-indulgence, and the fear of man too generally stimulate the desires and regulate the actions of young persons. Far from repressing the cravings of appetite, they seek to pamper and gratify them; and so far are they sometimes from being actuated

by the fear of God, that they would blush to ~~grow~~ such a motive, lest they should incur the ridicule of ~~kindred~~ dust and ashes. Well does the poet exclaim,

“ Oh! the presumption of man’s awe for man.”

The piety of Daniel and his three friends soon illustrated that declaration of the Almighty, “ I love them that love me, and they that seek me early shall find me;” for “ as for these four children, God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom;” and the spirit of prophecy was early imparted to Daniel, enabling him to interpret visions and dreams.

The Lord had graciously promised to be with his people in the land of their captivity, and he was now about to fulfil that promise, by raising Daniel to an eminent station, where he might be an instrument of usefulness to all his countrymen in Babylon. At the end of three years, the time allowed for their instruction, these four young men were brought before the king, with others who had enjoyed similar means of improvement. Nebuchadnezzar conversed with them, and found that they not only surpassed their fellow students, but were “ ten times better in matters of wisdom and understanding than all the magicians and astrologers that were in all his realm.” It is surely worth while to inquire by what means these young men had acquired a wisdom surpassing that of the aged, and an understanding superior to that of the experienced. That they applied diligently to the appointed course of study, and received with docility the instructions of their masters, is not to be doubted; but this will not sufficiently account for their pre-eminence; because of all who had studied or were studying in Baby-

lon (a city famed for all the learning of the east); some would surely be found, whose diligence and docility would not be inferior to theirs. We must, therefore, have recourse to the word of God for an answer to our inquiry, and we shall obtain a most satisfactory explanation of the terms *wisdom* and *understanding*. "Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding."*

The desire and endeavour "to perfect holiness in the fear of God," was the source of eminence to these young men, which, as is always the case, sooner or later, brought them into favour with God and man. It is easy to imagine that the distinction conferred by Nebuchadnezzar on these captives excited the envy of the Magi, or learned men, to whom he preferred them. But Daniel was shortly to render them a service, which, if it did not destroy their enmity, was calculated to stifle their unworthy feelings, and repress their desires of injuring him for the present. In the second† year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign he had a dream, so remarkable as to cause him great uneasiness of mind; which, nevertheless, escaped his memory, as to the circumstances of it. Sending for the usual interpreters, he desired them to tell him his dream and the interpretation of it. They, however, required the king to tell them the dream, which made him very angry with them; because their imposture was thereby evident. For, as the king justly concluded, if they had supernatural powers to explain the dream, they would, by the same means, know the substance of it.

The magicians, astrologers, &c. still persisted in their demand: averring that no man on earth could comply with the king's requisition, and that no king or ruler

* Job xxviii. 28.

† Daniel ii.

had ever imposed such a task on them. It was, they said, a secret which could only be disclosed by "the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh." Nebuchadnezzar, greatly enraged, immediately issued an order to destroy all the wise men of Babylon; and Arioch, the captain of the guard, going forth to execute it, sought for Daniel and his companions to put them to death. This being the first intimation Daniel had received of the king's dream, and subsequent displeasure with the wise men, he begged a short respite from Arioch; and going to the king, promised to fulfil his desire, if he would grant him a little time for that purpose. Having obtained this request he went home, and called upon his three friends to unite with him in supplications to "the God of heaven concerning this secret," that their lives might be spared. The Lord was pleased to hearken to their prayers, and to reveal the secret in a night vision to Daniel, whose joy on this occasion broke forth into a sublime thanksgiving to the God of heaven. Daniel's next care was to preserve the lives of the wise men; and for this purpose he repaired to Arioch, desiring him not to kill them, but to present him to the king, whose demand he was now prepared to comply with. When brought before Nebuchadnezzar he was careful to disclaim any merit for himself, in the communication he was about to make: assuring the king that no man could make known the secret; but informing him that "there is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets;" and adding that the Lord had not revealed it to him on account of any personal wisdom he possessed, but in order to make him an instrument of good to others. He then proceeded to relate the particulars of the dream, and to unfold the interpretation of it, in a prediction of the four great empires, which should sub-

ceed each other; and of that universal dominion which the Lord Christ Jesus should establish to "stand forever." I dare say you are tolerably familiar with the circumstances narrated in this chapter; yet, as I wish my letters to recommend the word of God, not to supersede it, I will beg you to read them over carefully; to compare the prediction with its historical fulfilment; and above all, to entreat the Lord, by his Spirit, to confer on you wisdom and understanding, that you may early devote yourself to the service of your God and Saviour. Daniel, as you know, was advanced by Nebuchadnezzar to great earthly dignity. But he had honours more congenial to his desires conferred on him in the favour and love of his God. In the seventh year of Zedekiah the Lord was pleased to speak of him, by the prophet Ezekiel, as one to be ranked with Noah and Job;* and in the tenth year of the same monarch the prophet was again commissioned to mention him in the reproof addressed to the prince of Tyre;† from which it is evident that the fame of his wisdom had extended all over the east; though he was not more than thirty-two years of age at that time.

LETTER VIII.

We must for the present interrupt our reflections on Daniel's history, to notice what is related of his three friends: as in the order of time their miraculous deliverance is previous to the other circumstances in the life of the prophet.

* Ezekiel iv. 14, 16, 18, 20. † Ezekiel xxviii. 2.

I have already adverted to Daniel's exaltation, and to his kind solicitude for his companions that they might share in it. They had with him dedicated their youth to God, and shared the privations which duty enjoined; they had also shared with him the favour of the Lord; and they were now not only to partake in his prosperity, but to be themselves eminently honoured as the servants of the living God; to be set forth as a spectacle to men and angels; as an example and encouragement to believers to the end of time.

The year after the destruction of Jerusalem, when Nebuchadnezzar, having settled the affairs of Syria and Palestine, was returned to Babylon, is considered to be that in which he set up the celebrated image of gold; and called upon all the people and nations under his widely extended sway, to fall down and worship it. Nebuchadnezzar very probably set up this image in honour of his idol Bel, to whom he ascribed the success of his warfare, and to whom he thus devoted a considerable part of the spoils acquired in it. Like many other idolatrous princes, he seems to have determined that all the nations he had overcome should reverence his idols; and the penalty he threatened for noncompliance was sufficient to compel obedience in general. We are not, however, to conclude that the Lord's people, who were captives in Babylon, obeyed this impious decree; or sought to escape the penalty by renouncing their allegiance to the Lord their God. There were, doubtless, many who, encouraged by the example and advice of Daniel and his friends, determined to "cleave to the Lord with purpose of heart," and to resist even "unto blood, striving against sin." The prophet Ezekiel too had been raised up to warn them against the sins which had caused their captivity; and

to renew the promises of a gracious restoration, on condition of their repentance.

Daniel is not mentioned at all in this transaction, though it is not probable he was absent; as his appointment was in the king's palace; and as all the great men who held either civil or military appointments, even in the provinces, were summoned by special command on this occasion. It may, therefore, be inferred, that the enemies of Daniel and his countrymen were deterred from making their first efforts against him, by the great favour in which he stood with the king. They doubtless hoped, by the accusation against his three friends, to implicate him, and all the Jews in Babylon. If such was their scheme, it was not ill concerted, according to worldly policy.

"But the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand." The means they employed for general destruction were, by divine interposition, converted into the means of general preservation to his people: and not only rescued them from present danger, but insured to them future safety in the worship and service of their God. I cannot suppose you are unacquainted with this wonderful narrative: therefore I shall not recount particulars, but merely offer remarks on them. Represent to yourself then the colossal statue set up in the plain of Dara, and the assembled multitudes ready to prostrate themselves at the appointed signal. See the monarch whose command they obey, and whose pride, as he contemplates this mighty assemblage of his subjects, suggests to him that he is something more than mortal, while the glittering pageant meets his view, the sounds of harmony awake at his bidding, and the multitudes fall down simultaneously to worship the golden image

which he has set up. It is easy to imagine him in this state of exaltation; for the pride of the human heart kindles under excitements very inferior to those he experienced. But what a mortification awaits him! In the midst of his complacency he is informed that certain Jews whom he had set over the affairs of Babylon; Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, are totally regardless of his mandate: not only showing a general neglect of his religious opinions, but refusing to obey his positive command on this public occasion. The transition from self-exaltation to anger is rapid when pride is wounded. The multitudes prostrated in obedience seem to vanish from his view, and three captives of a despised nation occupy all the regards of this potent monarch, who in rage and fury commands them to be brought into his presence: not doubting that they would longer resist the command, when urged by himself, under such impressive and imposing circumstances. When the accused stand before him, he affects to disbelieve the report he has heard; and affords them still the power of yielding to his authority; at the same time setting before them what he considers an irreversible doom; and exalting himself almost to omnipotence by the inquiry, "Who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?"

How striking is the contrast we behold, in the calm, but undaunted self-possession of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, when they decline making any apology to the king, and, in the simplicity of faith, express their trust in God for deliverance: declaring at the same time, that should the Lord see fit even to allow them to perish in his service, they should deem that preferable to a violation of his laws. Nebuchadnezzar's fury now

exceeds all bounds; and, in the madness of his rage, he commands the heat of the furnace to be increased; not considering that the sufferings of his intended victims will thereby be more quickly terminated: a mercy he, by no means intends to grant them. The king's command is too urgent to admit of any delay, his impetuosity too furious to allow of any remonstrance. The men are instantly bound hand and foot, and cast into the midst of the fire, the intense heat of which proves fatal to their executioners. There is a special promise in the word of God, which was on this occasion literally fulfilled to his believing servants: "When thou walkest through the fire thou shalt not be burned, neither shall the flame kindle on thee."* Nebuchadnezzar's rage, glutted by vengeance, has probably begun to abate; but that, and every other feeling, now give place to astonishment. The king, rising in haste, demands of his counsellors whether *three* men only were not cast into the fire, declaring that he perceives *four* walking unhurt amidst the flames; three of them he could recognize, as those he had condemned, but the fourth had a majestic and divine appearance, "like the Son of God." Forgetting his own pomp and state in the contemplation of this wonderful event, the monarch descends from his throne, and approaching the furnace, calls upon the triumphant servants of the most high God, to come out of it. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego obey the summons, and in the sight of the assembled multitudes come forth, not only uninjured by the fire in their persons, but not having the least impression made by it on their clothes; not having a hair of their heads singed by it. It is hardly possible

* Isaiah xliii. 2.

for us to conceive the feelings of these three men, whose faith and trust in God were by him rendered instrumental to his glory in so signal a manner. Nor was this all their reward; for they were made the means of singular and permanent benefit to their countrymen in the decree immediately issued by Nebuchadnezzar, and in the increasing favour and protection their farther advancement enabled them to confer. What shall we say then to these things? "If God be with us, who can be against us?" is the most striking inference to be drawn from this narrative. But there are other practical lessons to be learned from the conduct of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, which we shall do well to consider and apply to our own use. I have already adverted to their youthful piety and self-denial, but I must again recur to them as the foundation of their subsequent eminence. These promising blossoms of divine grace, watered by the dew of heaven, were now become mature fruits of the spirit, conspicuously beautiful and abundant. Let me then again entreat you, like them, to devote yourself early to the Lord your God, that like them you may in every danger, spiritual or temporal, be sustained by his grace, and guarded by his omnipotence. It is true you are not likely to be called upon to prostrate your body in reverence to a statue; but there is a danger as great, or greater, awaiting you; there is, alas! a golden image which Satan, the prince of this world has set up; and though he cannot, like Nebuchadnezzar, *compel* any to worship it, he too fatally *allures* multitudes to their everlasting ruin; by setting before them the riches, honours, and pleasures of time as the most desirable objects of attainment; as the most fruitful sources of

enjoyment. The holy scriptures continually warn us against these delusions; declaring that "the end of these things is death;" irremediable and everlasting ruin of soul and body. The Saviour himself has told us that we "cannot serve God and mammon;" we cannot by following our evil inclinations in this world attain to comfort here or happiness hereafter; for "he that soweth to the flesh, shall reap corruption; but he that soweth to the spirit, shall reap everlasting life." Make the word of God your study, and pray for grace to understand and obey it; that as you grow in years you may grow in grace, and abound in all the peaceable fruits of righteousness to the glory of God your Saviour.

LETTER IX.

AFTER the wonderful event we lately considered, and the consequent decree of Nebuchadnezzar, it is easy to suppose that the Jews were no longer subject to molestation on account of their religion; while the farther advancement of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego would doubtless contribute to their temporal prosperity also. These conclusions are strengthened by observing that no farther mention is made of any attempts against the people during the whole period of the captivity; not even under the cruel and dissolute successors of Nebuchadnezzar; for Daniel, who "continued unto the first year of Cyrus," would no doubt have recorded any remarkable circumstances which befell the Jews. Thus was fulfilled the Lord's promise to them, that he would acknowledge them, and set his eyes upon them

for good,* in the land of their captivity. The threatenings of God are no less sure of being accomplished than his promises, unless averted by timely repentance. This was now about to be proved by the infliction of those judgments denounced by the prophets against several of the heathen nations. In the nineteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign he laid siege to Tyre, of which place Ithobal was king. The pride and arrogance of this prince are depicted in the message sent to him by the prophet Ezekiel;† in which also his destruction is foretold. The reduction of this celebrated city cost the Babylonians thirteen years of hard service, for which they were not paid when they gained possession of it; as the inhabitants had contrived to remove their treasures. Nebuchadnezzar did not, however, confine his exertions to Tyre only, during these thirteen years, for he sent out detachments to the neighbouring countries, and was thus made instrumental in fulfilling the prophecies denounced against Ammon, Moab, Edom, Philistia, and Zidon. It was during this period also that Nebuzar-adan visited the land of Judah, where he found a miserable remnant of the Jews, whom he seized and sent to Babylon. Their number did not amount to seven hundred and fifty, and it can hardly be imagined why he molested them, unless it was to revenge the murders committed by Ishmael. Their removal, however, completed the predictions of God as to the utter desolation of the land, which was to be left without an inhabitant.

In the fourteenth year after the destruction of Jerusalem, the people of God were comforted by the prospects of future blessings to the church, in the visions of

* Jeremiah xxiv. 5, 6.

† Ezekiel xxviii. 1—19.

the prophet Ezekiel. This was doubtless part of the fulfilment of God's promise to them, that he would be their God, and that they should be his people.*

In the same year Pharaoh Hophra began to experience the truth of God's threatenings denounced against him, by a revolt of his subjects, who chose Amasis, one of his officers, to be their king; and obliged him to flee into Upper Egypt. But it was not only against the king of Egypt that judgments were foretold, but against the nation also; and, as we have already observed, Nebuchadnezzar was appointed to inflict them.† The prophet Ezekiel was now commanded to declare, that God would give the land of Egypt to Nebuchadnezzar, and that he should take her spoil and her prey as wages for his army; because they had had no wages for their service at Tyre, where they had wrought for God.‡ This declaration of the Almighty is a passage deserving our frequent and serious consideration. On the first perusal, it is calculated to excite our wonder; but that sentiment arises from our losing sight of the agency of God in all the events which occur, either to nations or individuals. His Providence ruleth over all, and his creatures are but instruments, by and in which he will eventually be glorified. How would it abate the thirst for conquest, and the pride of victory, were warriors and princes to consider themselves merely as the instruments of inflicting those punishments which the sins of a nation demand, and which in their turn will overtake them also. How would it allay the fears and repress the anxieties of individuals, were they to remember that the safety of their persons, and the success of their

* Jeremiah xxiv. 7.

† Jeremiah xliii. 10—12

‡ Ezekiel xxix. 17—20.

efforts are under the control of that God, who makes whatever use he sees fit of all his creatures. And how greatly would his people estimate the privilege of trusting in him, were they more fully persuaded that he makes all things work together for good to those who love him. Immediately after the reduction of Tyre, Nebuchadnezzar, taking advantage of the disturbed state of Egypt, led his army into that country, the whole of which he quickly subdued. After having put to death multitudes of the inhabitants, and desolated a great part of the country, he made an agreement with Amasis, whereby he confirmed him in the kingdom, as his deputy, and then returned loaded with spoils to Babylon. It was during this invasion of the land of Egypt, that the judgments of the Lord overtook those Jews, who, contrary to his command, had fled thither after the murder of Gedaliah. The Babylonians killed many of them, and carried others away with them as captives. After the Chaldean army had quitted Egypt, Pharaoh Hophra endeavoured to recover the sovereignty of that kingdom, and hired an army of mercenaries for that purpose. But he was defeated in an engagement with Amasis, near Memphis, and being taken prisoner, was conveyed to Sais, where he was strangled in his own palace. Thus was completed the prophecy of Jeremiah, in which God declared that he would give Pharaoh Hophra into the hands of those that sought his life.* Amasis met with no opposition after this, but was established in the kingdom, and reigned forty years from the death of Pharaoh Hophra.

In the nineteenth year after the destruction of Jerusalem, Nebuchadnezzar had the dream which is recorded

* Jeremiah xlv. 30.

in the fourth chapter of Daniel, and which was interpreted by that prophet. The Lord condescended to warn this proud monarch of the degradation that awaited him; and Daniel counselled him to break off his sins by righteousness, and his iniquities by showing mercy to the poor, as the means of averting the threatened judgment. The event, however, proved that neither the warning nor the counsel was regarded. So difficult is it to make any impression on the heart of man, when elated by prosperity; so powerless are warnings or reproofs, when they are not seconded by the grace of God striving in the heart! Having now ended all his wars, Nebuchadnezzar applied himself to complete those improvements in the city of Babylon, by which he rendered it one of the wonders of the world. I shall not at this time expatiate on its beauties and advantages, which you will find described at large by several historians;* if indeed you have not already met with them. They were, it seems, sufficient to inflate the proud heart of Nebuchadnezzar, notwithstanding the warning he had received. Twelve months after his dream, as he was walking in his palace at Babylon, and contemplating from thence the magnificence around him, he exclaimed, "Is not this great Babylon that I have built for the house of the kingdom, by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?"† Scarcely had he uttered these words, when a voice from heaven informed him that the kingdom was departed from him; and that very hour he was reduced to the condition of the beasts of the field, by losing his reason; and driven from the haunts of men, as being unfit for their society. In this distracted state he continued seven years; at

*See Rollin's Ancient History.

† Daniel iv. 30.

the end of that period the Almighty was pleased to restore his understanding, and to reinstate him in his kingdom. The acknowledgments he then made, and the thanksgiving he offered, afford a beautiful comment on this part of his history, which I earnestly recommend to your serious attention.*

Nebuchadnezzar did not live long after his restoration; he died the year following, which was the forty-third of his reign, reckoning from the death of his father. He was succeeded by his son, Evil-Merodach, who, as his name implies, was a wicked prince. It does not, however, appear that the captive Jews suffered any oppression from him; on the contrary, he showed great favour to their king, Jehoiachin: releasing him from the prison where he had been confined thirty-seven years, and admitting him to the honour of eating at his table continually; besides ordering him a daily allowance suited to his princely rank. The celebrated Croesus, king of Lydia, began his reign this year.

When Evil-Merodach had reigned two years, his tyranny and wickedness became so intolerable, as to incite his own family against him. A conspiracy was formed to put him to death, and to place Neriglissar, his sister's husband, on the throne. Jehoiachin is supposed to have died a short time previous to this, or to have shared in the fate of the king; as it is expressly said, he was fed by Evil-Merodach "until the day of his death."† In the life and death of this prince we have another instance of the fulfilment of prophecy. Jeremiah had been commissioned to declare that he should not prosper; and though the latter part of his

* Daniel iv. 34—37.

† 2 Kings xxv. 27—30. Jeremiah liii. 31—34.

life was rendered more tolerable by the favour of the new king, yet how long was the term of his imprisonment, compared with that of his prosperity! if, indeed, his state of dependance in the court of a foreign prince could be called prosperity.

On the death of Jehoiachin, Salathiel, his son, became the nominal prince of the captive Jews; but he did not live long enough to lead them back to their own land.

LETTER X.

NERIGLISSAR, in the first year of his reign, was engaged in a war against the Medes, whose king, Cyaxares, had just come to the crown, on the death of his father, Astyages. Cyaxares, or Darius the Mede, was uncle to Cyrus, prince of Persia, though only one year older than his nephew, who was now forty years of age. In this war the two princes united their forces, the command of which Darius conferred on his nephew.

You are doubtless well acquainted with the history of Cyrus, which, in some form or other, is in the hands of every schoolboy. I shall therefore advert to those parts of it only which are recorded in Scripture; or which have an immediate connexion with the history of the Jews. The most remarkable circumstance relating to this prince, is his designation by prophecy,* nearly two hundred years before his birth, as the restorer of the Jewish nation; as he who should say to Jerusalem, "Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy founda-

* Isaiah xliv. 28.

tion shall be laid." This declaration of Almighty God is to be considered as the origin of Cyrus's future greatness, and of the success he obtained. His education was such as would be calculated to render him hardy and vigorous in body and mind; and at the same time to develop those virtues for which he was afterwards distinguished; but all these advantages were conferred on him by the superintending Providence of God, who had promised* to go before him, to remove all obstacles, and subdue nations by his instrumentality. Cyrus had very early given proof of the valour which he afterwards displayed; for when only sixteen years of age, he went out to battle with his grandfather, Astyages, and the victory then gained by the Medes was chiefly ascribed to him. It does not appear that this success excited him to ambition; for there is no farther mention of his military exploits, till he was called upon to assist his uncle, on the occasion abovementioned. He spent the interval at the court of his father, the king of Persia, where he most probably gave himself up to the study of those pacific arts by which a prince attains to true greatness; and by which the real interest and glory of his subjects are promoted. When Neriglissar found that Cyaxares had called on the Persians to assist him, he made alliance with the several nations of Asia Minor, and by this means raised a powerful confederacy to oppose the two princes. The king of Armenia, who had hitherto been subject to the Medes, seems to have considered it impossible that they could withstand such a mighty force. He therefore thought this a good opportunity for shaking off their yoke, and consequently refused his contingent of money and troops, for carrying

* Isaiah xlv. 1—5.

departed, when God has consigned it to destruction? The Almighty had declared by his prophet, that "Though Babylon should mount up to Heaven, and though she should fortify the height of her strength, yet from me shall spoilers come unto her, saith the Lord.*

In the first year of Belshazzar, Daniel had the revelation of future events, which is recorded in the seventh chapter of his writings. The substance of these visions is the same as that of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, relating to the four monarchies, or empires, that were to succeed each other, previous to the establishment of the everlasting kingdom; but Daniel's visions are more comprehensive and explicit than those of the king, which he interpreted. In the third year of Belshazzar, Daniel saw the vision of the ram and the goat, and had the interpretation of it made known to him. You will find both in the seventh chapter, and if you compare them with the events recorded in Grecian history, no comment on my part will be needful.

The Medes and Persians under Cyrus carried on their conquests with such uninterrupted success, that Belshazzar, in the fifth year of his reign, thought it expedient to arrest their progress. For this purpose he went himself into Lydia, to concert measures with Cræsus, by whose advice and concurrence he formed a powerful confederacy, and hired a large army of foreign troops. Cræsus was appointed generalissimo of the united forces of Lydia and Babylonia, with which he was immediately to invade the kingdom of Media, while Belshazzar returned to Babylon.

Cyrus, in the meantime, gaining intelligence of these measures, was not tardy in his endeavours to counteract

* Jeremiah li. 53.

The prince who succeeded to the throne of Babylon is called by various names, in different profane writers; but as they all agree that he was the *last* king of Babylon, he must be the same who in Scripture is called Belshazzar. He is considered to have been the son of Evil-Merodach, and grandson of Nebuchadnezzar. Nothing is related of the early part of his reign by Daniel; but the writers abovementioned describe him as an impious prince; and their testimony is confirmed by what the prophet has recorded. His vices, however, were in some measure counterbalanced, as to their effects on the public welfare, by the wisdom and prudence of his mother, Nitocris, to whom he left the care of governing the empire, while he gave himself up to the pursuit of sensual gratifications.

Cyrus, in the meantime, was deliberating on his future prosecuting of the war; and consulting with Cyaxares, who had come to him out of Media. Both these princes agreed that by ravaging the enemy's country, no permanent advantage was gained; they therefore resolved to change their mode of warfare, and apply their forces to the taking of cities and fortresses; by which means they would be able to follow up and retain their conquests.

The Babylonians, under the direction of Nitocris, did all in their power to resist the invaders, and fortify the country against them. In Babylon, especially, nothing was neglected that human prudence could devise, to ensure the safety of the city; and so complete and extensive were the measures adopted, that to human foresight, and in human estimation, it seemed totally impregnable. But what are human prudence, and human foresight? what are the policy of rulers, and the valour of chieftains, when the strength of a nation is

departed, when God has consigned it to destruction? The Almighty had declared by his prophet, that "Though Babylon should mount up to Heaven, and though she should fortify the height of her strength, yet from me shall spoilers come unto her, saith the Lord.*

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* Jeremiah li. 53.

them. He marched against Cræsus, and encountered him soon after he had passed the river Halys. A battle ensued, in which the Lydians and their allies were totally defeated; and their projected invasion of Media at once frustrated. Cræsus retreated towards Lydia, and, not intending to risk another engagement till the ensuing campaign, dismissed his auxiliaries, with orders to rejoin him in the spring. Cyrus, however, following up the advantage of his recent victory, pursued Cræsus, and came up with him just after he had dismissed his allies. The Lydians, however unwilling, were obliged to engage, and a second defeat was the consequence. Cræsus, with much difficulty, now retreated to Sardis, his capital, where Cyrus immediately besieged him. This siege did not last long; for though Cræsus made a noble defence from within, and sought succours from without, the efforts of the assailants were too vigorous to be repulsed by the former, and too prompt to allow of the arrival of the latter. The city was taken, and Cræsus made prisoner, by which means the whole of Lydia became subject to Cyrus; and the hopes of Belshazzar, from this quarter, were utterly annihilated. After this, Cyrus successively reduced the other kingdoms of Asia Minor; and then carried his victorious troops into Syria and Arabia, where constant success attended his efforts: because the Lord, according to his promise, held him by his right hand, to subdue nations before him. Babylon being at length the only place which held out against him, he put the affairs of his other dominions in such order that they might not prove an interruption to him; and then formally laid siege to this memorable city.

LETTER XI.

THE reduction of Babylon was, to all appearance, a most difficult enterprise, on account of its extent, population, strength, and ample means of subsistence. The walls were extremely high, and as you, doubtless, know, proportionably thick; they were defended by a large armed force, for whom, as well as for the inhabitants, a store of provisions sufficient for twenty years was laid up in the city. Nor was this all; for the gardens and fields within the walls were capable of yielding large supplies when fully cultivated; so that it seemed even more unlikely that the place should be reduced by famine than by the force of arms. The inhabitants, relying on these advantages, felt perfectly secure, and not only despised the attempts of Cyrus, but openly scoffed at him from their walls. He, however, no way discouraged by the aspect of difficulties, went on with his works, intending, if possible, to take the place by assault. But finding that he made very little impression this way, he changed his measures, and resolved on the more tedious method of reducing the place by starvation. Knowing that the city was likely to hold out a great while in this way, he divided his army into twelve parts, one of which he appointed to guard the trenches each month. By this means he spared his troops the continual toil they must have endured in keeping the field during the whole year. Two years had passed in this manner, and many more were doubtless expected to pass in a similar manner on both sides, when Cyrus thought of a stratagem which gained

him; an entrance into the city with the utmost facility. Among the improvements made by Nebuchadnezzar when he embellished the city of Babylon, was a wall of brick and bitumen, the foundation of which was laid in the bottom, or bed of the river. This wall was very thick, and formed a magnificent embankment on each side of the river, in its course through the city, beginning a little above it, and ending a little below it. At distances corresponding with those of the principal streets were large brazen gates, with stairs leading down to the river, for the convenience of embarking or landing. These gates were open by day, but were always closed at night. While this wall was being built, it was necessary to divert the course of the river; and for this purpose a very large lake, or reservoir, was formed on the north-western side of the city, into which the river was turned, by means of a canal communicating with it, till the work was finished. The lake, though no longer needful as to its first intention, was nevertheless kept open to receive the superabundant waters of the Euphrates, at the times of its overflowing, and thus became an appendage to the beauty and convenience of the city, till the time appointed by God for its fall, when it was converted into the means of destruction. Cyrus had observed this reservoir, and was doubtless informed of the purpose to which it had been applied, for he resolved to make it subservient to his views in a similar manner. An opportunity soon occurred for making the attempt; he was informed that an annual festival was about to be celebrated in Babylon, on which occasion it was customary for the inhabitants to pass the whole night in feasting and drunkenness. Towards evening he sent a party of his men:

to break down the bank which was between the river and the canal that communicated with the lake; then dividing his army into two parts, he posted one above the city, where the river entered it, and the other below it, where the river ran out; with orders to advance as soon as they found the bed of the river passable. He also opened his trenches on each side of the river, to accelerate his project, by letting the water run into them. About midnight, the river being sufficiently drained, the two parties advanced. Gobrias and Gaddates, whom the tyranny of Laborosoarchod had driven into revolt, and who, as I told you, went over to Cyrus, served as guides on this occasion. The Babylonians were not, as usual, lulled in security; but they were immersed in revelry, and so intent on their pleasures, that they had neglected to shut the gates which led to the river. The troops of Cyrus, therefore, had not the slightest resistance to surmount; they entered the city by these gates, and the two parties met at the palace before the slightest suspicion of danger had occurred to the luxurious inhabitants. The guards of Belshazzar were quickly overpowered; he and his nobles attempting to defend themselves, were killed; and Cyrus having thus made himself master of the city, issued a proclamation of life and safety to all who would lay down their arms and submit to him: by which means the farther effusion of blood was prevented, and the war, which he had carried on twenty-one years, was terminated.

This is the account given by profane historians of the taking of Babylon. Let us now turn to the sacred writings for the farther confirmation and elucidation of these facts. In reviewing what is recorded in the Bible respecting the fall of Babylon, I shall consider

the predictions of that event by the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah, with their exact completion. I have already noticed God's appointment of Cyrus as the instrument for inflicting his judgments on Babylon, and extending mercy to his own people. The Medes and Persians also are mentioned several times as called by the Lord against this idolatrous and proud city.* But there are several minute circumstances which are no less worthy of notice, because they were accurately predicted. The prophet Isaiah had declared that the city should be taken by surprise, and that the fall of it should be inevitable and sudden. "Therefore shall evil come upon thee; thou shalt not know from whence it ariseth: and mischief shall fall upon thee; thou shalt not be able to put it off; and desolation shall come upon thee suddenly; which thou shalt not know."† The draining of the river is prophetically declared both by Isaiah and Jeremiah;‡ and the occasion on which the besiegers would use their stratagem is specified by the latter as that of a festival, in which the princes and nobles should be put to death in the midst of their revelry. "I will make drunk her princes and her wise men, her captains and her rulers, and her mighty men; and they shall sleep a perpetual sleep, and not wake, saith the king, whose name is the Lord of Hosts."§ The confusion that ensued when it was discovered that Cyrus had got into the city, had been predicted by Jeremiah. "One post shall run to meet another, and one messenger to meet another, to show the king of Babylon that his city is taken at one end."||

* Isaiah xiii. 17. xxi. 2. Jeremiah li. 11, 28.

† Isaiah xlvii. 11. ‡ Isaiah xlv. 28. Jeremiah l. 38. E. 36.

§ Jeremiah li. 57. || Jeremiah li. 31.

The predictions I have hitherto cited, relate more properly to the events recorded by profane historians; but there are others of which we find the completion in the account given by the prophet Daniel. In the fifth chapter of Daniel we are told, that "Belshazzar, the king, made a great feast to a thousand of his lords," and that in the midst of it he sent for the vessels of gold and silver which Nebuchadnezzar had taken out of the temple at Jerusalem. It is evident that the king sent for these vessels for the express purpose of profaning them; not only by using them as common drinking vessels; but by expressing contempt for the Lord Jehovah, to whom they had been dedicated; for, "they drank wine in them, and praised the gods of gold and of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone." This act seems at once to have filled up the measure of Belshazzar's iniquity, and he was quickly made to feel the terrors of guilt and impiety. On the wall, immediately opposite where he sat, came forth the fingers of a man's hand, and wrote upon the plaister, while he in surprise and dismay looked on. A sight like this was sufficient to appal the most courageous; among whom we cannot surely rank Belshazzar: for the impious are always cowards when fortitude is requisite. We cannot wonder, therefore, that "his thoughts troubled him, that the joints of his loins were loosed, and that his knees smote one against another." This event, with the effect of it on the king's mind, was the subject of prophecy. Isaiah speaking of the ruin of Babylon, introduces Belshazzar as terrified with a grievous vision, bowed down at the hearing of it; and dismayed at the seeing of it: and causes him to exclaim, "My heart panted, fearfulness affrighted me: the night of my pleasure hath he turned

into fear unto me."² The same prophet also represents the calling for the astrologers and soothsayers to read and explain the writing; with their utter inability to help the king in this time of perplexity and dismay: "Thou art wearied in the multitude of thy counsels. Let now the astrologers, the stargazers, the monthly prognosticators, stand up, and save thee from these things that shall come upon thee. Behold, they shall be as stubble; the fire shall burn them; they shall not deliver themselves from the power of the flame."[†] It was on this memorable occasion that Daniel was again publicly distinguished; though it appears that Belshazzar did not previously know him, either personally or by reputation.‡ The queen who came into the banquet house, is considered to be Nitocris, who had taken the reins of government; while her luxurious son made use of his kingly power only as the means of personal gratification. It is not to be supposed that Daniel had ever been removed from his elevated station of prime minister. Nitocris speaks of him as one with whose superior worth she had long been well acquainted; and it is not presuming too far to conclude that the wisdom of her measures was chiefly the result of his counsels and experience. The disinterested conduct of Daniel on this occasion, and his noble demeanour before the king; the ingenious firmness of his rebuke, tempered with mild expostulation; his open avowal of faith in the God of Israel, before an assembly of idolators; all prove him to be the same holy man we have already admired. He was now grown old in the service of the nation, by whom he was highly honoured, though an alien and a captive. He was also grown old in the service of his God, who

* Isaiah xli. 2, 3, 4. † Isaiah xlvii. 13, 14. ‡ Daniel v. 11.

had greatly honoured him as an instrument of his glory, and by whom he was still preserved and strengthened for every event and every trial. We must however take leave of him for the present, to notice what he has farther related of Belshazzar, whom he briefly mentions as being slain that same night. This account agrees with what the profane historians tell us. Daniel does not speak of Cyrus at this time; but says that Darius the Mede took the kingdom, which was actually the case, because Cyrus acted as military commander under his uncle, and would therefore take possession of all conquests in his name. I must beg you to read attentively all the chapters from which I have extracted the predictions respecting Babylon. You will find in them many others on the same subject; but as these were not fully accomplished on the first taking of the city, I have forbore to notice them, till I can do so in reference to their completion. This conquest of Cyrus put an end to the Assyrian or Babylonian empire. "The head of gold was now broken to pieces, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing-floors."* I know of no comment on this subject equal to that you will find in the tenth chapter of Isaiah, from the fifth verse to the nineteenth, inclusively. I earnestly recommend you to read it with prayer for an understanding heart, that you may be enabled to perceive and know that, "The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein;†" that "The counsel of the Lord standeth for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations;"‡ and that "Whatsoever the Lord pleaseth, that doeth he in Heaven, and in the earth."§

* Daniel ii. 31—43.

† Psalm cxiv. 1.

‡ Psalm xxiii. 11.

§ Psalm cxxxv. 6.

LETTER XII.

WHEN Cyrus had settled his affairs in Babylon, he went into Persia to visit his father and mother, who were yet living. On his return he married the daughter of Cyaxares, and thereby became heir to the throne of Media, as she was the only child of his uncle. Cyaxares (or Darius the Mede, as Daniel calls him) accompanied Cyrus to Babylon, and there in concert with him, established the government of the mighty empire their united efforts had gained. They divided the whole into one hundred and twenty provinces, the government of which was committed to as many military commanders, in remuneration of their long and arduous services during the war. Over these governors three presidents were appointed, of whom Daniel was the chief. This preference was certainly extraordinary, and on the part of Darius and Cyrus, a proof of wisdom. The prophet himself tells us the cause of it, namely, that "an excellent spirit was found in him;" and from what he subjoins, it would appear that Darius thought of making him sole president. These accumulated honours conferred on him excited the envy of the other presidents and governors, who conspired against him; determining to effect his ruin by some means. His wisdom, prudence, and integrity, were such, that no accusation could be laid against him on account of mal-administration in the government; his enemies therefore came to the conclusion, that their purpose could be effected only by finding occasion against him "concerning the law of his God." Even on this account they durst not

hazard an open impeachment, against one who was so deservedly an object of the king's particular regard. If they had, it is probable Darius would not have considered the matter so seriously as these worthless men desired; for he must have been devoid of religious feelings, or he would not so readily have fallen into the snare, which their impious flattery laid for him. When the decree was made known, the venerable servant of God doubtless understood the purport of it; but his faith was superior to the fear of man; and his hope was fixed, trusting in the Lord his God. He did not court persecution, by any unusual display of religious zeal; nor did he seek to avoid it by secrecy. "He went into his house, and his windows being open in his chamber towards Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God; as he did aforetime." The holy Scriptures abound with instances of God's merciful regard to the prayers of his people. More than a hundred and thirty examples are enumerated in a work extracted from the Bible, called "The Achievements of Prayer." And whenever any of the children of God become eminent in his service, the origin of their eminence is found to be a large measure of his Grace given in answer to fervent, persevering, faithful prayer.

You know I have already adverted to Daniel's piety as the source of his eminence; but we must not forget that prayer is the foundation of piety; and we see in the example of this holy man, that he considered it as such; for though he attained to an unparalleled degree of honour and wisdom, he knew that daily communion with God, and daily communications of his grace, were absolutely needful to uphold him in body, soul, and

spirit. The enemies of Daniel, who assembled to watch him, soon found the opportunity for accusing him to the king. Darius, now discovering the base motive of their adulation, was displeased with himself for having been the dupe of it; and earnestly sought to deliver Daniel. The princes, however, were not so mercifully inclined; they went in a body to the king, and insolently told him that the law he had made for others must not be broken by himself. Unable to deliver himself from the distress his rashness had brought upon him, and equally unable to rescue Daniel from the malice of his enemies, he was obliged to give him up to them. At the moment of consigning him to this unmerited infliction, a ray of hope seems to have cheered the king, who said to Daniel, "Thy God whom thou servest continually, he will deliver thee." This hope, however, was probably inspired by the undaunted calmness of Daniel; for it forsook the king on his return to the palace, where he passed the night fasting; refusing his customary recreations, and unable to find repose in sleep. "Then the king arose very early in the morning, and went in haste unto the den of lions." These few words express very fully the perturbed state of the king's mind; what then must have been the transition of his feelings, when his address to Daniel was answered from within the den; and the voice of his faithful minister assured him, that the Lord his God had sent his angel and shut the lion's mouths,* so that they had not hurt him. The king gladly caused Daniel to be taken out of the den; and having submitted to the law, he was now at liberty to punish the conspiracy, by means of

* St. Paul manifestly refers to this in his Epistle to the Hebrews, xi. 33.

which it had been enacted. The enemies of Daniel were consigned to the destruction they had intended for him; and he was advanced to great prosperity and honour, which seem to have been uninterrupted during the rest of his life. But the beneficial effects of Daniel's faith were not confined to himself alone; for Darius published a decree, that in every dominion of his kingdom, men should fear and tremble before the God of Daniel, who had delivered him from the power of the lions. This decree must have proved a great advantage and safeguard to the captive Jews; for though one of the same import had been made by Nebuchadnezzar, it is not likely that much regard would be paid to it by the Medes and Persians, who were now masters of the country. This is another wonderful instance of the faithfulness and mercy of God towards his people; while he chastened them in measure, according to their need; he would not make a full end of them; all his ways towards them were ways of mercy, preparatory to the fulfilment of his promise in their restoration.

It appears from the testimony of ancient writers, that Cyrus was not at Babylon during the persecution and deliverance of Daniel; he is said to have been engaged in an expedition to Syria and Egypt, in which he had great success.

In the first year of Darius, Daniel having computed the number of years, according to the prophecy of Jeremiah, understood that the term of the Jews' captivity had nearly expired. He had experienced the efficacy of prayer, and therefore, as he tells us, he "set his face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes." The beautiful confession and prayer, which are recorded

in his ninth chapter, were scarcely ended, when the angel Gabriel was sent to make known to him, not only the certainty of Israel's temporal restoration, but the certainty and period of the spiritual deliverance to be effected by *Messiah the Prince, who would make reconciliation for iniquity, and bring in everlasting righteousness; who would be cut off, but not for himself.* This revelation made to Daniel is most explicit as to the nature of Christ's office; and serves to explain what is meant by Jeremiah, when he speaks of him as "The Lord our Righteousness." It also fixed the time of the Saviour's coming into the world, which his advent has proved to be exact. To Daniel and such of his devout countrymen as were looking for something more than a temporal deliverance, these predictions must have proved a source of peculiar comfort. But to us who have witnessed their accomplishment, and seen the establishment of Messiah's kingdom in the world, during more than eighteen hundred years, they must appear with such additional lustre, as should excite "wonder, love, and praise," in the highest degree.

LETTER XIII.

ON the death of Darius the Mede, which happened about two years after the taking of Babylon, Cyrus returned to that city, and took upon himself the government. He had succeeded to the throne of Persia a short time before this, on the death of Cambyzes his father; therefore from this era is reckoned the commencement of the second great empire, namely, the

Persian. It was in this year, which was certainly the first of his reign, that Cyrus made the remarkable proclamation which we find in the first chapter of Ezra. The sacred historian tells us, that "the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus," to accomplish the predictions of Jeremiah; and the tenor of the edict shows that Cyrus was acquainted with that prediction. It is not to be doubted that Daniel had made it known to him, as well as that prophecy of Isaiah, where he was mentioned by name, so many years before his birth; for he speaks of himself as one to whom "the Lord God had given all the kingdoms of the earth," with an injunction "to build him a house at Jerusalem."* The prophet Daniel has not himself recorded this event, but he has informed us, in his tenth chapter, that he was still alive in the *third* year of Cyrus; and we may of course conclude, that he who was so earnest and diligent in prayer, would not be heartless and negligent in the use of such means as were in his power: whereby he might be so immediately instrumental in promoting the glory of God, and the welfare of his people. It is probable that Cyrus, in his expedition to Syria and Egypt, had observed with astonishment the utter desolation of so fine a country as Judea, and formed such purposes respecting it, as would induce him to consult his wise and faithful minister as to the means of re-peopling it. But, as an old writer observes, whatever second causes were subservient, it was God's overruling power, which turns the hearts of princes according to his will, that brought about the restoration of the Jews; and we shall see that the time and manner of it were exactly conformable to the predictions of the Lord, by the mouth of his prophets.

* Ezra i. 2.

God had declared by Moses,* that if his people would not hearken to him, he would bring their land into desolation, so that their enemies should be astonished at it; that he would lay waste their cities, and cause them to be taken away into the land of their enemies. That while they were in captivity the land should enjoy her sabbaths, and should rest, because they had not allowed it the rest appointed by God once in seven years,† while they dwelt upon it.

At a later period, Jeremiah was commissioned to declare to the impenitent Jews, that their whole land should be a desolation and an astonishment, and that they should serve the king of Babylon seventy years. We have seen how literally these prophecies were fulfilled. After the death of Gedaliah, the land was forsaken by the remnant, who obstinately persisted in retiring to Egypt; but its utter desolation was completed when Nebuzar-adan took away the small number of Jews he found there, and sent them to Babylon. The voice of mirth, and the voice of gladness, had long ceased at this time; but the removal of this last remnant caused not only the "voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride" to cease, but left the land to silence and darkness, without even "the sound of a millstone" to be heard, or the "light of a candle" to be seen.‡ In this state the land of Judea had remained fifty-eight years, when Cyrus issued the decree of restoration to the Jews, according to the promises of God to that effect. We shall now do well to consider

* Leviticus xxvi. 32.

† Leviticus xxv. 4. God graciously anticipated the unbelief of the Israelites, and vouchsafed them a promise of great plenty in the sixth year. See verses 20, 21, 22, of the same chapter.

‡ Jeremiah xxv. 11.

§ Jeremiah xxv. 10.

none of those promises, before we proceed in the narration of the events by which they were so graciously fulfilled. When Moses was commanded to denounce God's judgments against the Israelites if they walked contrary to his laws, the Lord mercifully assured them that he would not utterly destroy them, nor cast them away when in the land of their enemies; but that, if they would humble themselves, and repent, he would remember his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and would also remember the land.*

By the prophet Isaiah the lord was pleased to declare, that he would say to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be inhabited; and to the cities of Judah, Ye shall be built.† That he would appoint Cyrus as his shepherd, to perform all his pleasure, "even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid."‡

The prophecies of Jeremiah, written at a later period, are much more explicit: in them we find declarations from Almighty God, that when seventy years were accomplished, he would punish the king of Babylon and his nation;§ that he would, at the same time, perform his good word towards his people, in causing them to return to their own land, where they should dwell safely, and not only enjoy temporal prosperity, but partake also of spiritual mercies; as they should be his people, and he would be their God.||

After the destruction of Jerusalem, Ezekiel was commanded to prophesy concerning the land of Israel, calling upon the mountains to shoot forth their branches,

* Leviticus xxvi. 40—45.

† Isaiah xlv. 26.

‡ Isaiah xlv. 28.

§ Jeremiah xxv. 12.

|| Jeremiah xxix. 10—14.

and yield fruit, for the Lord's people Israel, who were at hand to come; and declaring that the land should be tilled and sown, the cities inhabited, and the waste places built.* To these promises also were superadded others of spiritual import; wherein the Lord declared that for his own holy name's sake he would have pity on them, give them a new heart, and put a new spirit within them, that they might walk in his ways, and be his people, humbling themselves before him for their iniquities, and being ashamed and confounded for their own ways.†

These spiritual promises were intended, not only for the people of Israel, but for the whole Israel of God, his universal church to the end of time; and they afford subjects of meditation to believers, which are at once consolatory, encouraging, and delightful.

With regard to the ancient people of God, these promises have not yet been fully accomplished; but the declarations of Scripture, and the present circumstances of the Christian church, afford lively hopes that the time is not very far distant, when the Jews will be gathered from all countries whither their unbelief has caused them to be scattered, and will become the Lord's people in Christ Jesus. The duty of Christians, in the contemplation of this glorious event, is earnest prayer to God in behalf of his alienated people: since he has declared that he will be inquired of to accomplish his promises to the people of Israel.

* Ezekiel xxxvi. 8—11.

† Ezekiel xxxvi. 22—38. See also Ezekiel xxxvii. Jeremiah xxxiii. 36—41.

LETTER XIV.

WE are now to return to the history of the Jews as narrated by Ezra, a priest, and a descendant of Seraiah the high priest. He was, as he tells us, a ready scribe in the law of Moses, which the Lord God of Israel had given. The decree of Cyrus was no sooner made known than such of the Jews as regarded the honour of God, and valued the covenant of his promise, prepared for their departure from Babylon. Ezra tells us, that the number of them was forty-two thousand three hundred and sixty, besides their servants, whose number amounted to more than seven thousand. Most of the Jews who returned at this time were of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin; but there were many of the tribe of Levi, as mentioned by Ezra, and many more from the other tribes, who, though not mentioned by name, may be included among "those whose spirit God had raised to go up to build the house of the Lord." The decree of Cyrus was addressed to *all* the people of the Lord God of Israel, and it may well be inferred, that many among the ten tribes, who were now become his subjects, would avail themselves of the decree, and rejoice in the privilege of restoration to national and religious freedom.

When Hezekiah, in the beginning of his reign, restored the worship of the Lord at Jerusalem, he sent a proclamation throughout the land of Israel, calling upon the people to come and keep the passover; and though the invitation was not generally complied with, we are told that some humbled themselves, and came to

Jerusalem.* It was not long after this that the ten tribes were carried away into Assyria, on which occasion it is most probable that these penitents would find refuge in Judah, and continue to dwell there afterwards with their families, till all were involved in the Babylonish captivity. However this may be, it is certain that, after their return, other tribes besides those of Judah, Benjamin, and Levi, dwelt at Jerusalem.†

Saint Luke tells us that Anna the prophetess was of the tribe of Aser; and St. James addressed his epistle "to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad." From these and other passages of Scripture, it is evident that, though the people had the general name of Jews, from the tribe of Judah, a specific distinction of the twelve tribes was preserved among them; which could not have been the case had two or three tribes only made up the number of those who returned.

Salathiel, the prince of Judah, being dead before this time, his title had devolved on his son Zerubbabel, who was constituted governor of the land by Cyrus. The Jews doubtless considered him as their king; since he was grandson to Jehoiachin; but it does not appear that he assumed regal state, or acted in any respect as an independent sovereign. Yet according to the prophecy of Jacob, the sceptre did not depart from Judah, since their internal policy was not disturbed or regulated by the Persian government; but they were governed by a prince of their own nation, according to the law of God, given them by his servant Moses. To Zerubbabel (whose Persian name was Sheshbazzar) Cyrus committed the holy vessels belonging to the temple, which Nebuchadnezzar had brought to Babylon; that

* 2 Chron. xxx.

† 1 Chron. ix. 3.

he might carry them back to Jerusalem. The people who staid behind, as well as those who went up with Zerubbabel, contributed vessels of silver, gold, beasts of burden, with useful and precious commodities, besides a free will offering to assist in the great work they were about to undertake.

In the second chapter of Ezra (verse second) we find the names of the chiefs who accompanied Zerubbabel. From the smallness of their number, it may be inferred, that, "not many mighty" engaged in the pious and patriotic service to which the whole nation was called. Many of them had doubtless established themselves in the land of their captivity, and preferred the enjoyment of luxurious ease, and temporal gratification, to the exertion which was needful, in order to partake of national distinction and spiritual privileges. Such is the constant tendency of riches and luxury. Those who are exposed to their influence, cannot be too watchful against their inroads; nor too careful in applying the declaration of our Lord concerning such as trust in them.*

Jeshua, who is mentioned immediately after Zerubbabel, was the high priest by lineal descent from Seraiah, who held that office when Jerusalem was destroyed, and who was put to death by Nebuchadnezzar at Riblah†. I remind you of that circumstance, that you may not consider the Seraiah here mentioned, as the same person; and I must also inform you, that the Nehemiah and Mordecai of this passage are not to be identified with those of the same name, with whom I presume you are already acquainted; and whom I shall hereafter have occasion to introduce to your more immediate

* Mark x. 24.

† 2 Kings xxv. 18—21.

notice. King David, in the latter end of his reign, when he was preparing to build the house of the Lord, and settling the affairs of the kingdom for Solomon, divided the priests and Levites into twenty-four courses or orders, in which they were successively to come up and minister in the temple at Jerusalem.* Their number at that time amounted to thirty-eight thousand; but of those who returned from Babylon, there were only four thousand two hundred and eighty-nine; these were of the courses of Jedaiah, Immer, Malchijah, and Harim; so that the other twenty courses must either have staid behind or become extinct. These four courses were subdivided into the original number, twenty-four; and were called by the same names, with one exception only, the name of Pashur, the son of Malchijah, being substituted for that of his father. The liberated captives and their leaders arrived in Judea about the beginning of spring, and immediately separating according to their tribes and families, repaired to their several cities and began to rebuild them. The offerings made by the chiefs and people, towards rebuilding the temple, amounted to more than seventy-five thousand pounds, of our money, besides one hundred priests' garments. In the seventh month, which was appointed for the observance of three several solemnities, the people assembled at Jerusalem, where Jeshua set up the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings thereon, according to the law of Moses. The first day of this month they celebrated the feast of trumpets; and on that occasion began their offerings, which were afterwards continued, "as the duty of every day required," although the foundation of the temple was not yet laid.

* 1 Chronicles xxiii. xxiv. xxv.

The tenth day of this month was the day of atonement, and on the fifteenth began the feast of tabernacles, which lasted seven days. The people, who during all this time remained at Jerusalem, were not inactive in setting forward the rebuilding of the temple. They gave money to the different artificers, and sent provisions to the Tyrians and Zidonians, in exchange for cedar trees from Lebanon, which were to be brought by sea to Joppa; according to the grant of Cyrus. At length, about six months after the altar was set up, all the preparations being completed, the people again assembled at Jerusalem, and the foundation of the temple was laid with great solemnity. The priests in their apparel, with trumpets, and the Levites with musical instruments, and songs of praise, gave thanks to the Lord; because he is good, and his mercy endureth for ever. A very affecting scene was witnessed on this occasion, for the people shouted with a great shout, and praised the Lord, because the foundation of the temple was laid; but many of the priests, Levites, and chief fathers who were old enough to remember the first temple; wept aloud, when they compared the glory and prosperity of the nation at the time Solomon's temple was built, with its subsequent degradation, and present condition. So great was their distress, that the historian tells us; "the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people."

* Ezra iii. 11—13.

LETTER XV.

THE enemies of the Jews, who were principally the Samaritans, no sooner found that the temple was being rebuilt, than they resolved to hinder the progress of the work. But having, as it would seem, no pretext for an open attack, they determined to seek sneaky. They came therefore to Zerubbabel, and proposed to unite with the Jews in building the temple, alleging that they worshipped the God of Israel in the same manner as his people; and had done so since the time that Sennacherib had brought them up to dwell in the land. You may not perhaps remember the origin of these people; therefore I shall briefly refer to it, as related in the seventeenth chapter of the second Book of Kings.

In the reign of Hoshea, the last king of Israel, Sennacherib, king of Assyria, came up against Samaria, and after a siege of three years, succeeded in taking the city. As Hoshea, by secret conspiracy, had previously shown himself unworthy of being left to govern the land, as a tributary king; Sennacherib resolved to carry him and his people into captivity, and to repopulate Samaria by colonies from other parts of his dominions. He accordingly "brought men from Babylon; and from Cuthah, and from Ava; and from Hamath; and from Sepharvaim; and placed them in the cities of Samaria, instead of the children of Israel; and they possessed Samaria, and dwelt in the cities thereof." Though the Lord had thus "removed Israel out of his sight," for their sins, and caused the heathens to possess their land; his own honour was to be vindicated among the latter,

who very probably considered him as a God of little power, since his professed worshippers had fallen into the hands of their enemies; At their first coming into Samaria, "they feared not the Lord, therefore the Lord sent lions among them." This terrible visitation they attributed to their neglect of the God of the land, and therefore sent to the king of Assyria (Esarhaddon) to know what they ought to do. The king commanded one of the priests of Israel to go up and dwell in the land, to teach these new inhabitants "the manner of the God of the land." One of the priests accordingly went up, and dwelt in Bethel, to instruct the people, who from that time offered sacrifices to the Lord God, but did not renounce their former superstitions. "They feared the Lord, and served their own gods;" such according to the rites of the nation from whence they came. This mixed kind of worship seems to have been more hateful to the Jews, after their return, than absolute heathenism; it is not therefore surprising, that the pious Zerubbabel, and his council, rejected the proposed alliance with disdain. This was the occasion the Samaritans were seeking, and their alleged motive for open hostility. Not satisfied, however, with their efforts to interrupt the builders, they endeavoured to put a stop to the work altogether, by obtaining a public edict to that effect. They hired counsellors at the court of Borsippa, to make injurious representations to the king; as has Daniel was very probably dead at this time, his services would not be backward in supporting the views of the Samaritans against the Jews. These pretended indignities have been under hand during the reign of Cyrus, whose regard for Daniel, and whose belief in

197. 11. 12. 13. 14. * Daniel xii. 3—18. (1800)

the prophecies of the Lord God, were too well known, to allow of a hope that he would in any way counteract his own edict. This prince died in the seventh year after the Jews' return, and was succeeded by his son Cambyzes; who is called Ahasuerus by Ezra. He was of a very different character to his father; and having neither the same motives for showing favour to the Jews, nor the same tender regard for the welfare of his subjects in general, the Samaritans considered him a proper instrument to be wrought on for their revengeful and malicious purposes. No longer constrained to use secret measures, they wrote a letter against Jerusalem, to the king, the tenor of which, while it exalted their own grateful loyalty, represented the Jews as a rebellious people, who were rebuilding their city in order to fortify themselves therein, that they might shake off the authority of the Persians, and cease to pay them tribute. In support of their accusation they referred the king to the Babylonish annals, that he might see and know that the city was a rebellious city; and plainly told him that the rebuilding of it would occasion him the loss of all his provinces west of the Euphrates. This letter had all the effect the Samaritans could desire; and the king's answer giving them authority to put a stop to the building, was by them taken triumphantly to Jerusalem, and carried into effect with the utmost rigour. Cambyzes, in the fourth year of his reign, invaded Egypt; and partly by stratagem and the treachery of Phanes, who revolted from the king of Egypt, and went over to the Persians, and partly by force of arms, he subdued the whole of that country, and annexed it to the Persian empire. Psammenitus, the king of Egypt, was at first treated with some consideration by the victor; but en-

endeavouring to regain his authority, he was put to death. This conquest of Egypt was a farther fulfilment of the prophecies respecting that kingdom, which had been successively desolated by civil war, and the invasion of Nebuchadnezzar, and which was now reduced to the low rank of a province. According to the same predictions, it was again to become a kingdom, but it was to be the "basest of kingdoms," and such we shall find it to be, as we pursue the course of its history. Cambyses died in Syria, on his return from Egypt, in the third year after his invasion of that country, and in the eighth of his reign. He had undertaken expeditions into Ethiopia and Hammonia, in both of which he had entirely failed.

1. The successor of Cambyses was Smerdis the Magian, an impostor; who, as you probably know, obtained the crown by his resemblance to Smerdis, the brother of Cambyses, whom the latter had caused to be murdered. The reign of this usurper was of short duration; for his imposture being fully discovered, seven Persian nobles conspired against him, and having put him to death, elected one of their number to be king of Persia; as there were no male descendants of Cyrus, to whom the kingdom could devolve by right of inheritance. The name of this monarch elect was Darius Hystaspes, the same who is mentioned by Ezra,* and by the prophets Haggai† and Zechariah.‡ Though the prohibition of Cambyses, by which the Jews had been restricted from building, ceased at his death, they did not avail themselves of that circumstance to resume their labours. They were probably dispirited by the hinderances they had met with; and disappointed that they had not ob-

* Ezra iv. 24.

† Haggai i. 1.

‡ Zech: 4: 1.

tained by miracle, that success which the Lord is generally pleased to accord in the use of means, even when the undertakings of his people are of a spiritual nature. In this supine state they continued till the second year of Darius, when the weight of national depression was increased by the prospect of famine. The spirit of prophecy, which had been withheld since the time of Daniel, was now mercifully restored. Haggai and Zechariah were both sent to them in this year; the former in the sixth month, the latter in the eighth. Haggai was commissioned to arouse them from their negligence: to call upon them to "consider their ways;" and to inform them that the barrenness of their land was judgment from God, because they had finished their own houses, and were dwelling at ease in them, regardless of his glory. This message was accompanied by a command to proceed with the building; and a promise that the Lord of Hosts would take pleasure in it, and would be glorified. It is worthy of remark, that during the whole time the Jews were prohibited by the Persian monarchs from building the temple, no command was sent to them from God to continue it. They were not to prosecute any good work by means of insurrection; but to seek the peace of the nation to whom God had subjected them, and embrace the earliest opportunity of proceeding in their work, when they could do it lawfully. Zerubbabel and Joshua, with all the people, immediately gave heed to the word of the Lord by Haggai, and resumed the building. Their prompt obedience was graciously regarded by the Lord, who sent an encouraging message by the prophet, to assure them of his presence and assistance; and the fulfilment of this promise was quickly experienced; for, "the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerub-

babel; the son of Sheathiel, governor of Judea, and the spirit of Joshua, the son of Josedech, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and did work in the house of the Lord of Hosts their God."* The Jews had not long recommenced building the temple, when their watchful enemies renewed their persecutions. They had not now the power to make them desist, as formerly, by force; because their authority, in this respect, had expired with the king who gave it; but they made earnest application to Tatnai, the new governor of Syria and Palestine, who had lately been sent thither by Darius, and endeavoured to prejudice him against the Jews. Tatnai, however, being a person of some moderation and justice, went himself with some of the accusers to Jerusalem to inquire into the matter; and seeing the nature of the building, gave no orders to impede its progress, but merely took down the names of those who presided over it, with their account of the grant of Cyrus, in order to transmit them to Darius, and refer the affair to his investigation and decision. Ezra tells us, that "the eye of their God was upon the elders of the Jews, that they could not cause them to cease, till the matter came to Darius; and then they returned answer by letter concerning this matter." About a month after this, Haggai was commissioned to deliver a gracious message to Zerubbabel, Joshua, and all the people, to dispel the gloom that had spread among them in comparing this temple with that built by Solomon. The Lord again encouraged them by the assurance that he was with them, and that he would make the glory of this temple to exceed that of the first: inasmuch as the "desire of all nations;"

* Haggai i. 14.

the Messiah should come to it, as the Prince of Peace.* In the eighth month of this year, Zechariah was endued with the spirit of prophecy, and sent to exhort them to remember the punishment inflicted on their fathers, and to turn to the Lord by repentance.† It appears that the people were not inattentive to this merciful warning; for, in the ninth month, Haggai, after declaring the cause of the scarcity in their land, was allowed to predict that the Lord would bless them again with plenty; and, on the same day, a special promise of favour and protection was sent to Zerubbabel.‡ These gracious declarations were still farther confirmed, in the eleventh month, by the prophet Zechariah, who saw, in a vision, the angel of the Lord interceding for Jerusalem; and heard the Lord declare that he was returned to Jerusalem with mercies, and would cause his house to be built in it; notwithstanding the efforts that would be made by the enemies of his people, to hinder the work.§

LETTER XVI.

THE enemies of God's people are frequently made to feel that their efforts to destroy or injure them are not only rendered ineffectual, but are made conducive to their preservation and prosperity. Thus it was with the Samaritans who sought to hinder the building of the temple; for when Tatnai wrote an account of the whole matter to the Persian court, Darius commanded search to be made among the records of the empire for the decree of

* Haggai ii. 1—9.

† Zech. i. 1—6.

‡ Haggai ii. 10—23.

§ Zech. i. 7—21.

Cyrus, and, having found it, sent a special order to Tatnai, forbidding him to hinder the work, or to allow of any molestation being offered to the Jews. Nor was this all: for Darius made a decree, that the governor should furnish them with all that was needful for carrying on the work; with animals for sacrifice, and with food for the priests, out of the king's goods collected by tribute in those parts; "That they might offer sacrifices of sweet savours unto the God of heaven, and pray for the life of the king, and of his sons." The king farther decreed, that whoever should infringe this law, should have timber pulled down from his own house, and should be hanged thereon; and imprecated the judgment of God on all kings or people who should attempt to alter or destroy the house of God at Jerusalem. Tatnai, the governor, and the Samaritan chiefs, were constrained to comply with this decree, immediately after it arrived; though, as we may suppose, it was the cause of extreme mortification to the latter. The Jews, thus assisted by the providence of God, continued their work prosperously, receiving continual encouragement from the prophets Haggai and Zechariah.

This decree of Darius was considered by the Jews as a complete restoration of their privileges, and as a source of national rejoicing; so that the people who still remained in Babylonia and other parts of Asia thought it expedient to consult the prophets and elders at Jerusalem, as to the future observance of those fasts which they had kept during seventy years, in commemoration of their national calamities.* The Lord's answer enjoined them to obey the precepts he had given by the former prophets; to "speak every man the truth to his

* See note F.

neighbour; to execute the judgment of truth and peace in their gates; and not to imagine evil in their hearts against their neighbours, nor to swear falsely; of these things they were to abstain from, as being hateful to the Lord; and such as no rigours or austerities could atone for. To encourage them to obedience, a gracious promise was added that the four fasts they had observed should be converted into cheerful feasts; times of joy and gladness.*

In the fifth year of Darius we have to contemplate a further fulfilment of God's prophecies respecting the desolation of Babylon. The neighbourhood of that city had suffered greatly from the inundations occasioned by Cyrus's breaking down the bank or dam of the river, when he drained it; and the city itself had been degraded from the rank of a metropolis, by the removal of the seat of government to Susa or Shushan. The haughty Babylonians doubtless considered this as an insult, and determined to shake off the Persian yoke. The time they chose was probably that of the revolution effected by Darius; but as their plans required to be matured, they did not openly revolt till the fifth year of his reign; when, having stored the city with provisions sufficient for many years, they considered themselves in a condition to resist the utmost efforts of Darius against them. The king having sent a large force to reduce them, they resolved not to risk a battle, but to wait the event of a siege, which they hoped to protract till the Persians should be exhausted by toil and delay. I have formerly referred you to many predictions respecting Babylon;† at the same time telling you that their accomplishment was not fully effected by Cyrus. At this

* Zech. vii. viii. 14—19.

† See Letter XI.

times a new prophecy was uttered by Zechariah, in which the Lord declared that he was about to bring ruin upon Babylon; and called upon his people to come out of her.* This was indeed a merciful warning; for the first act of the besieged was replete with a cruel desperation, to which the Jews must have fallen victims, had they remained in the city. The prophet Isaiah had predicted that widowhood and the loss of children should come upon the Babylonians in a moment, in one day; and that these two calamities should be heightened to their utmost extent, they should come "in perfection."† This was literally accomplished; for the besieged, desirous of holding out many years, came to the barbarous resolution of killing their wives and children; in order that their provisions might last longer. The dreadful massacre was effected in "one day;" and it was certainly a calamity "in perfection," since they were not only the sufferers in it, but the agents of it. This horrid precaution was ineffectual, and their confidence vain. God had decreed their ruin; and human means, however plausible, could avail them nothing in preventing, or even in postponing it. The siege had been carried on by Darius twenty months, with a little prospect of success, as Cyrus had in the same way; but the place was again taken by a stratagem, different in its nature from that of Cyrus; but equally successful in its effects. Zopyrus, one of the king's favourites, having inflicted on himself some of the horrid chastisements in use among the Persians, by cutting off his ears and nose, went to the Babylonians, and persuading them that he had suffered these indig-

* Zech. ii. 6, 7. See also Isaiah xlviii. 20. Jer. l. 8. li. 6, 8, 48.

† Isaiah xlvii. 8, 9.

nities from Darius, offered to join in their revolt against him. Being received among them, he gradually acquired so much of their confidence that he was at last entrusted with the government of the city, and thereby enabled to deliver it up to Darius. The king, consigning the city to plunder, took away the gates of it, and reduced the walls to one-fourth of their former height. About three thousand of the rebels were put to death, and the rest were pardoned. Thus was this proud city brought down to "sit in the dust,"* and given up as a spoil to those who had been "her servants." Thus did "Babylon sink,"† and she never afterwards rose from the evil that the Lord brought on her, but fell into utter contempt and desertion, till not a vestige of her site was left; till she became a "possession for the bittern, and pools of water,"‡ a wilderness, and a perpetual desolation. I have entered more fully into the facts relating to this city, that you may again compare them with the prophecies respecting it; and see how circumstantially they were fulfilled. The destruction of Babylon took place towards the end of the sixth year of Darius; and, according to the promises of God to the Jews, their prosperity kept pace with the desolation of their former oppressors;§ for in the beginning of the seventh year of that monarch the temple was finished and dedicated. The festival of this dedication was kept by all the people, with great joy; not only at Jerusalem, but in all other parts where they resided; for Ezekiel specifies those who had remained in the land of their captivity, as well as those who had returned; and mentions the offerings as being made by all. Twelve he

* Isaiah xlvii. 1.

† Jer. li. 64.

‡ Isaiah xiv. 23.

§ Isaiah xiv. 3, 4.

goats were presented as a sin offering, according to the number of the twelve tribes of Israel. This affords a proof that none of the tribes was considered to be extinct; and supports the inference that some of each tribe had returned with Zerubbabel. This festival was celebrated in the twelfth month of the Jewish year, and the passover was kept on the fourteenth day of the next month, which was at the beginning of the year, according to its original institution.* The observance of this rite was general also; though it does not appear that the people came up to Jerusalem, from other parts of Asia, to celebrate it, as they afterwards did. It is very probable that this solemn institution had been greatly neglected, if not altogether disregarded, since the reign of Josiah; and it is certain that the circumstances of the people had not allowed of such a celebration as the present, since that time; for Ezra tells us that they "kept the feast of unleavened bread seven days with joy: for the Lord had made them joyful, and turned the heart of the king of Assyria unto them, to strengthen their hands in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel." While the people acknowledged God as the author of all their mercies, they were not unmindful of the king, through whose instrumentality their national comfort was promoted. One of the gates of their temple was called the gate of Shushan; and on it was a sculptured representation of that place, in memory of the decree published by Darius from thence. This gate is said to have remained till the time when the temple was destroyed by the Romans under Vespasian. I forgot to tell you that the period which elapsed from laying the foundation of the temple in the second year of

* See note G.

the gigantic power of the Persians. It is not my intention to enter particularly into the relation of these events, with which you are perhaps familiar, and which are to be found in the histories of the nations more immediately concerned in them; but I shall advert to two or three circumstances, as being connected with sacred history by prophecy. While Darius, in the latter part of his reign, was making preparations to repair the defeat his army had sustained in Greece, under Mardonius, the Egyptians, thinking the occasion favourable to their views, revolted against him; and endeavoured to maintain their independence. Darius, no way impeded by this event, determined to make war on them, and on the Greeks at the same time; but in the midst of his preparations he was overtaken by death, in the thirty-seventh year of his reign. The succession to the Persian empire had been settled on Xerxes, the second son of Darius, who peaceably ascended the throne, and pursued the course his father had marked out; in his preparations for war against Greece and Egypt. His first operations were directed against the latter; and his success was equal to his desire; for he quickly subdued the revolters, and made the yoke they had attempted to shake off heavier than before. It is scarcely needful to remind you that this was a farther fulfilment of God's denunciations against the kingdom, which he had said should always be base. Xerxes, elated by his success in Egypt, determined on the invasion of Greece, in which he engaged the Carthaginians to second him, by attacking the Grecian colonies in Sicily and Italy; that they might not be able to assist the mother country, against which his immediate efforts were to be directed.

LETTER XVII.

THE decree of Darius having confirmed the purposes of God towards the Jews, and frustrated the designs of their enemies, uninterrupted prosperity seems to have been allowed them during the reign of this king, and that of his successor. The history of a nation during peace seldom affords any features sufficiently prominent to attract the notice of beholders, or adorn the descriptions of historians. One year is no like another, that the lapse of time is scarcely perceived; while, like a smooth silent stream, it pursues its course, unruffled by storms, unimpeded by rocks. The promises of God to the Jews were daily fulfilled in their quiet enjoyment of their privileges as his people. The land was not "only sown and sown,"* but blessed with fruitfulness. The cities were rebuilt and inhabited. "Old men and old women dwelt in them, each leaning on his staff for very age;" and "the streets of their cities were full of boys and girls, playing in the streets thereof."† In this manner we are to account for a period of more than fifty years, in which the Jewish writers are almost silent; the confirmation of the decrees of Darius by Xerxes, in the first year of his reign; and the death of Jeshua the high priest, about two years after, being the only facts recorded by them. This interval was, however, a period of the greatest interest to other nations, being, as you doubtless know, that in which the Grecian states were so conspicuously distinguished by their successes against

* Ezekiel xxxvi. 9, 10.

† Zechariah viii. 4, 5.

and the substance of the broken images became "a burden to the weary heart," while their infatuated worshippers saw them carried away "into captivity." The successor of Jeshua in the high priesthood was Jotham, or Joachim, his son.

LETTER XVIII.

On the death of Xerxes, in the twenty-first year of his reign, Artaxerxes Longimanus, his third son, ascended the throne. He is considered to be the same who is called Abasuerus in the Book of Esther, and consequently a very interesting character in the annals of the Jewish nation. I conclude that you are well-acquainted with the narrative contained in this part of Scripture; I shall not therefore repeat it, but only offer such remarks as you may not yet have met with on the subject, begging you to refer continually to the Bible, which you will, of course, have always at hand while reading my letters. The first circumstance we notice, is the magnificence and munificence of the king in his royal feast, the splendour of which must have surpassed all that we can imagine. It is pleasing to observe that he had wisely anticipated the consequences of this luxurious banquet, and made a law that none should compel others to exceed the bounds of temperance. How much it is to be regretted that, in Christian countries, a rule quite contrary to this is too frequently predominant; even in a social dinner party, compulsion, either of urgency or ridicule, is often


* Isaiah xlii. 1, 2. See also Jeremiah l. 2. li. 44. 47. 62.

employed to overcome the scruples of those who consider
“wine as a smother, and strong drink as madness.”

The monarch seems, however, to have transgressed the bounds of temperance himself, or he would not have required the queen to come and show herself to his lords and princes. The customs of Persia required that ladies should not associate with any persons but those of their own sex ; and it was on this account that Vashti made a separate feast for the women in another palace belonging to the king. Scenes of festivity are seldom more congenial to prudence than to temperance. The queen, feeling that an insult was offered, made no allowance for circumstances ; but, instead of begging to be excused, by urging the impropriety of compliance, sent a positive refusal by the king's chamberlains, who came to conduct her. The king being greatly displeased, consulted his seven counsellors,* as to the punishment he ought to inflict upon Vashti. They advised him to put her away from being queen, and to take another in her stead ; because her example might influence all the women of Persia, as well as the ladies of the court, to reject the authority of their husbands. An intemperate feast, in which, as we are told, the king's heart was merry with wine, was not a fit season for the enactment of a new law, or for passing judgment on an offender ; and the king, when his wrath was appeased, seems to have remembered Vashti with tender regret, which was probably heightened by the impossibility of retracting the sentence against her. Thus far we may consider the narrative in a moral point of view, and gather from it very profitable reflections, both on the vanity and deceitfulness of worldly pleasures, which always bring dis-

* See note H.

appointment, and frequently distress in their train ; and also on the dangers of intemperance, by which men are too often involved in irremediable misery of body and soul. But there is another view, in which we are henceforth to regard the events related in this book, I mean that of the over-ruling Providence of Almighty God, who can make even " the wrath of man to praise him," and who, on this occasion, raised an orphan girl to the dignity of a queen, that she might become instrumental to the preservation of his people. There are several circumstances in the narrative, from which we may infer that Esther had been piously educated ; and that she was no less amiable in disposition, than lovely in person. The preference given to her by Hegai was doubtless, as in the cases of Daniel and Joseph, from the Lord ; but, like them, she had no doubt devoted her youth to the God of Israel ; and her moderation, when taken to the royal palace, proves that she was superior to the allurements of a court, or the fascination of personal vanity. Could she have asked any thing on behalf of her uncle, she would probably have made a request for him ; but he had desired her not to acknowledge him ; and, however painful such a silence about one so dear to her, she observed his injunction ; even after she was raised to the throne ; doing " the commandment of Mordecai like as when she was brought up with him." It was not long before she had an opportunity of introducing Mordecai to the king's notice, as one who had discovered a plot against his life. The matter being investigated, the conspirators were punished, and the circumstances of their guilt, with the means of its discovery, were recorded in the annals of the kingdom. We may easily suppose Esther felt some disappointment that the signal service



of Mordecai was not rewarded ; this, however, was a light affliction in comparison of that preparing for her by Haman, in which, not only the precious life of her uncle was threatened, but the utter extirpation of the nation to which she belonged. We are not expressly told why Mordecai refused to Haman the homage of obeisance, which was ordered by the king himself ; but we must conclude that it was from some cogent motive, whereby he was induced to obey God rather than man ; and from the context it is generally supposed to have been the descent of Haman by which he was influenced.*

Haman's rage at this disrespect must have been very great, if we judge of it by the vengeance he meditated ; yet, courtier like, he repressed the violence of his feelings till he could gratify them to the utmost. The measure he resolved on has, I believe, no parallel in history : the destruction of a whole nation in revenge for a personal affront offered by an individual, implies a degree of turpitude to which it is to be hoped few attain. Haman's anxiety in this matter was subjected to a considerable delay by his superstition ; for he cast the lot in the *first* month, to determine in what month and on what day of the month he should execute his horrid purpose ; and the lot falling in the *twelfth* month, it was suspended till that time. Here again we behold the interposing arm of the Lord outstretched for the protection of his people, who, by this delay of eleven months, had time to pursue such measures for their safety as might be allowed them. Haman's impatience urged him to get the decree immediately ; it was there-

* He is supposed to have been an Amalekite. Esther iii. 1. Exodus xvii. 14—16.

fore prepared and despatched to the governors of the several provinces, the very day after he had cast the lot. The money Haman offered the king must have been a great sacrifice on his part;* it was intended as a compensation of the loss that would be sustained to the king's treasury, by the death of so many subjects. The blind partiality of Abasuerus for his favourite, induced him to remit this sum; and this is by no means surprising, after he had been prevailed on to concede the lives of so many persons to his mere request, without hesitation or inquiry. The jealousy of a despotic prince is ever on the watch, and his suspicious fears render him an easy dupe to the artifice or cruelty of enterprising and tyrannical ministers. It is shocking to observe with how little concern the king regarded the decree he had issued. While the publication of it seems to have perplexed and agitated all his subjects, he and Haman sat down to drink. The publication of the decree in all the provinces, caused universal mourning and fasting among the Jews. Those of Judea and Jerusalem are not expressly mentioned, but they were doubtless included. Esther in the meantime remained ignorant of all that was passing. As her affinity to the Jews was not known, the subject was not mentioned to her; and as no persons in the garb of mourners were admitted within the precincts of the palace, Mordecai no longer "walked every day before the court of the women's house, to know how Esther did." It is not to be supposed that Esther was long before she made inquiry about her uncle; for when she found he was absent on some mournful occasion, she sent immediately

* 10,000 talents of silver, if Jewish talents, amount to more than 4,000,000 sterling.

to comfort him. His refusal of her offered kindness excited her alarm; and she deputed one of her chamberlains, to whom she seems to have confided the secret of her kindred, to inquire of Mordercai what it was that caused his grief, and why it was he refused to be comforted. The return of Hatach with a copy of the decree, and the command of her uncle to present herself before the king, contrary to law, plunged the queen into the deepest grief and perplexity. She sent her confidant again to Mordecai, telling him that her life might be forfeited by complying with his desire. Mordecai, however, took a different view of the subject. He knew that the Lord would not forsake his people; and that though the decree was according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which altereth not, the promises of God could not be rendered ineffectual by the purposes of man, nor his Providence counteracted by the edicts of princes. He went even farther into the matter, and indulged the hope that Esther's elevation was a merciful provision of the Omniscient for this exigency. Esther, less experienced in the ways of God, was not so sanguine in her expectations; yet she resolved to pursue the measure enjoined by her uncle as an imperious duty; and only required a delay of three days, in which she and her maidens might in humiliation and prayer seek the help and protection of Almighty God. The task she had to perform was one of extreme difficulty, considered either in an active or passive point of view. Her venturing into the king's presence uncalled, was perhaps an unprecedented measure, and required great resolution; while the assuming of a cheerful countenance, so foreign to the emotions of fear and grief in her heart, demanded a still greater share of fortitude

and self-possession. It is not easy to imagine a more critical situation than that of Esther, while awaiting her sentence of life or death from the king; but she had committed herself to the care of Him who never disappoints the hopes of his confiding servants; and he disposed the heart of Ahasuerus not only to extend the emblem of protection to her, but to promise compliance with her request, even should it require the half of his kingdom. The transition from a state of terrific suspense to one of safety and hope, must have been almost overpowering to the tender frame of the young queen, who probably felt too much agitated to prefer her request at this time; and therefore invited the king to a banquet in her apartments. We are not told why she invited Haman also; but as he seems to have been the companion of the king's convivial enjoyments, the banquet might not have been so agreeable to the latter without him. Some persons have conjectured that Esther nobly determined to accuse Haman when present; but it is hardly to be supposed that she would desire the company of one so unworthy, merely from such a motive. However it may be, the plan was no doubt concerted by her and Mordecai; and its success committed, by the prayers of many, to the all-wise disposal of Almighty God. The king seems to have been much pleased with Esther's entertainment; as he again urged her to make some request, whereby he might give her a signal mark of his royal favour. Her deferring till the next day the important cause she had to plead, is not easily to be accounted for. Perhaps it was according to a previous arrangement; or she might have felt still unable to speak on the subject. This can only be matter of conjecture; but it is certain that the

delay was by God's Providence over-ruled to the consummation of his purposes. Haman's pride at the distinction conferred on him by the queen, and his mortification at the neglect of Mordecai, are admirably depicted by his own account to his assembled relatives and friends. His example affords a striking proof of the insufficiency of honours and riches to human happiness. Who that had seen him come forth from the banquet, "joyful and with a glad heart," as the prime favourite of the king and queen, would not have pronounced him a happy man? And who, after hearing the recital of his dignities, honours, and wealth, would have expected to hear him say in conclusion, "All this availeth me nothing," or would have supposed that the contempt of an obscure individual could counterbalance such distinctions as those to which he had attained? When he had resolved on the death of Mordecai, his malignity was gratified, but he was not the less restless and uneasy. Haman however was not the only restless person, for "On that night could not the king sleep," and the minister's impatience to see his royal master was anticipated in a manner he little expected. It is not possible, perhaps, to conceive the tormenting rage that filled his heart, when he found himself obliged to execute, on behalf of Mordecai, the plan he had devised for his own exaltation. Mordecai seems to have been no way elated by the distinction conferred on him; for it is said, "he returned to the king's gate." Little did he imagine how narrowly he had escaped destruction; and as little did Esther apprehend that any fatal consequence could ensue to her uncle, from the apparent favour shown by her to his enemy. Thus it is continually with us: dangers impend over us, and conse-

quences frequently result from our most trivial actions, which if not averted by the watchful Providence of God, would prove destructive of our peace, and involve us in misery and ruin. This should excite our thankfulness, not only for those daily mercies which are known and conspicuous, but for the large measure of peace and safety we enjoy, in a world abounding with sorrows and dangers. Esther must have been greatly encouraged by the distinction conferred on her uncle at so critical a moment. His loyalty was now made apparent, and in her appeal to the king, would afford a direct contradiction to the assertion of Haman, that "it was not for the king's profit to suffer the Jews in his dominions." This interposition of God's Providence could hardly be misunderstood; it was so evidently accorded to the united prayers of his people, and so opportunely afforded in the time of their need, that Esther was doubtless emboldened to prefer her suit to the king, in humble confidence that it would be rendered effectual by the King of kings. Haman, on the other hand, saw in this event only a presage of his own ruin, though he knew nothing of the queen's concern in the affair. Impenitent sinners know the Lord only as a God of justice; therefore the changes effected by his Providence frequently alarm their consciences, and fill them with those fears which are emphatically called the terrors of the wicked. The character of this unworthy favourite was so truly despicable, that no one seems to have commiserated his downfall; for on the first intimation of the king's displeasure, the officers of the palace were ready to impeach him, as wanting in loyal attachment to the person of his royal master, and his having conspired the death of one to whom the king owed so much, was urged in support of

the accusation. It is not indeed unlikely that Hamán aspired to the throne: his desire to appear in public with all the insignia of royalty, fully declares his ambition; and he was probably waiting only till his plans were matured, or a suitable occasion offered to declare himself. By the death of Haman the Jews were delivered from their chief enemy; but the decree which had gone forth against them could not be recalled. The king, however, gave unlimited power to Esther and Mordecai to frame another edict, by which the Jews should be allowed to arm in their own defence, to withstand any attempts made by their enemies to destroy them, and to take the life and spoil of all who should assault them by virtue of the former decree, on the thirteenth day of the month Adar. This edict was issued just two months and ten days after that of Haman, and was forwarded with the utmost despatch into the hundred and twenty-seven provinces of the empire, where it caused to the Jews joy and gladness, a feast and a good day; and so fully declared the care of the God of Israel for his people, that many of the heathens, struck by their wonderful preservation, separated themselves from idols, and became worshipers of the true God. The joy of Esther in being the instrument of her people's deliverance, was doubtless very great; and we may be certain, that it was augmented by the advancement of her beloved uncle, who would now have free access to her, and share not only the delightful feelings of her heart on this occasion, but those affectionate attentions which it must have been so painful to her to withhold. Her piety and that of Mordecai are conspicuous throughout the narrative, and the perpetual remembrance enjoined by them of God's merciful protec-

tion, affords a proof of the lively gratitude with which they acknowledged it.

The Jews still commemorate this deliverance annually during three days in the month Adar. The 13th they observe as a fast; because that day was fixed on for their destruction: the 14th and 15th they celebrate as a festival; being the days on which they triumphed over their enemies. The fast they call the fast of Esther; the festival is named the feast of Purim. On this occasion the Book of Esther is solemnly read in all their synagogues; and wherever the name of Haman occurs, they express their detestation of his character, by clapping with their hands, stamping with their feet, and exclaiming, "Let his memory perish."

LETTER XIX.

IN reviewing the Book of Esther, I have deviated from the regular order of time, that I might not interrupt the course of that wonderful narrative. The plot of Haman was defeated in the twelfth year of Artaxerxes; but there are many important events recorded of the Jews at Jerusalem, which took place at an earlier period of his reign. For information respecting these, we must turn to the seventh chapter of the Book of Ezra. How this excellent man obtained from the king all that he requested, or by what means he was introduced to his notice, we are not positively told. He very properly ascribed all to the Great First Cause, the hand of the Lord his God upon him; but commentators have inferred that Esther was in some way instrumental to the

favour shews him by Artaxerxes; and there is no reason for rejecting the inference, as she was at that time received into the king's house, and greatly beloved by him; though not yet raised to the dignity of queen. Ezra had prepared his heart, not only to seek the law of his God, and to do it, but also to teach it in Israel; and the Lord graciously answered the desires of his heart, and disposed the king to empower him fully to proceed in the work he was about to undertake. By the decree of Artaxerxes, Ezra was appointed governor of Judah and Jerusalem; with authority to establish every thing according to the laws of God; and with the power of life and death, to see that those laws were taught and enforced. To all who were willing to embrace this opportunity of returning to the land of Judah, the king gave permission to accompany Ezra; and fourteen hundred and forty-six persons, with their families, took advantage of this permission. The king and his counsellors sent offerings of great value for the service of the God of Israel; and empowered Ezra not only to raise a contribution among the Jews in Babylon, but to apply to the king's treasurers in Syria and Palestine, for whatever more was needful for the house of God. Artaxerxes seems to have been acquainted with the decrees of Cyrus and Darius; for there is a remarkable similarity to them in that which he enacted. In the latter part of it, he enjoins that whatever was ordered by the God of heaven, should be done diligently; lest there should be wrath against the king and his sons, which plainly indicates that he was not ignorant of the judgments God had inflicted on the princes of other nations. As a farther testimony of his veneration, the king exempted the priests, Levites, and all others

who did service in the house of God, from every kind of tax or tribute. Ezra, on receiving the decree of Artaxerxes, expressed his pious joy by blessing the Lord God of Israel, who had put such a thing in the king's heart, to beautify the house of the Lord at Jerusalem. When he had assembled the people who wished to accompany him, he remained with them in tents three days, during which he reviewed them, and settled the order of their journey. Finding that there were no Levites among them, he sent a deputation to Iddo, at Casiphia, to require ministers for the house of God. These were called upon to accompany the travellers, and officiate for them in holy things by the way, as well as to be the bearers of the holy vessels, the first-fruit offerings of the people, and the offerings made by the king and his counsellors. As soon as these ministers arrived, Ezra proclaimed a solemn fast, and humbly supplicated the guidance and protection of Almighty God, for himself and all that were with him. How beautifully does this holy man explain the cause of his not requiring a convoy to guard his pious company, and their devoted treasures! "I was ashamed," says he, "to require of the king a band of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy in the way, because we had spoken unto the king, saying, Thy hand of our God is upon all them for good, that seek him; but his power and his wrath is against all them that forsake him."* Ezra experienced the blessing of him "whose hope the Lord is,"† and arrived safely at Jerusalem, four months after his first setting out. Having rested three days, he began his public ministry by delivering up the vessels of silver and gold, by number.

* Ezra viii. 22.

† Jeremiah xviii. 3.

and weight, to such of the priests and Levites as kept the treasures of the temple. At this time, also, those who had come with him offered burnt-offerings to the Lord, according to the original number of the tribes of Israel, as on a former occasion. Ezra's next care was to deliver the king's orders to the governors of the several provinces, who, complying with all that was required of them, gave assistance to the Jews, for the embellishment of the temple, and for the offerings to be made there. Thus far all was prosperous and pleasant; but the faithful minister had soon a very painful duty to perform; for some of the princes came to inform him that the people had made affinity with the idolatrous inhabitants of the land, and were thus seduced to follow their evil customs. Nor was this fatal transgression confined to the poorer sort of people only, for many of the princes and rulers had been conspicuously forward in it. The grief and dismay of Ezra at this intelligence deprived him of the power of utterance. Though he had not shared in the guilt of the people, he felt the deepest humility on account of it; and this was the prevailing sentiment of all who regarded the honour and authority of God, or considered the inevitable ruin to which a departure from him would expose them. Ezra knew that the sacrifice of God is a broken and contrite heart; therefore, at the time of the evening sacrifice, he made a public confession and supplication in the name of all the people; recounting God's mercies towards them, and expatiating on the sin and danger of rejecting his laws, as their forefathers had done. The devout sorrow of this excellent man had the desired effect; and his prayer received a merciful answer; for the Lord touched the hearts of the people with compunction, so that they shed tears of penitence; and

many of the rulers came to Ezra, and offered to enter into a covenant, that all the strange wives, with the children they had borne, should be put away. "Arise," said they, "for this matter belongeth unto thee; we also will be with thee; be of good courage and do it." Thus encouraged, Ezra immediately arose and exacted from the priests, the Levites, and the people, an oath that they would do according to this proposal of the princes. When he had thus brought them into a solemn covenant, he consented to remain in one of the priest's chambers; though he still observed a rigid fast on account of the transgression of the people. A proclamation was next issued, requiring all the people to assemble at Jerusalem within three days, under the penalty of being severed from the congregation, and of forfeiting their possessions. This assembly took place in the ninth month, in a season of much rain; therefore when Ezra called upon the people to acknowledge and forsake their transgression, they consented with one voice to do so; but begged him to send them back to their several cities, and cite them from thence, successively, till all should have complied with his requisitions; and the wrath of God should be turned from them. Ezra yielded to their desire, and with the assistance of some of the princes, examined and decided all the causes that were brought before them during three months, till they had made an end with all the men that had taken strange wives; among whom were many of the priests, Levites, and nobles of Israel. All who were convicted, agreeing to do according to the law of God, and to abide by the oath they had made, presented a ram of the flock for their trespass.* This transaction closes the Book of Ezra; but we shall not

* Leviticus vi. 6.

yet take leave of him. He is supposed to have continued in his office of governor till the appointment of Nehemiah, thirteen years after; though no farther mention is made of him in the intermediate time. About five years after the appointment of Ezra, and in the same year that Haman's plot was defeated, died Joachim the high priest. He was succeeded by his son Eliashib.

LETTER XX.

There is in the ninth chapter of the Book of Daniel a remarkable prophecy, to which I must call your attention; at this time; as it is that which determined the period of our Lord's Advent. The angel Gabriel informs Daniel, that "Seventy weeks are determined upon his people, and upon his holy city, to *finish the transgression, to make an end of sins, to make reconciliation for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy.*" In prophetic language, weeks are sometimes used in allusion to the sabbatical years; and instead of seven days, consist of as many years. The seventy weeks thus reckoned, amount to four hundred and ninety years, which, as we are told in the succeeding verse, were to be counted from the going forth of the commandment to restore and build Jerusalem. Four several decrees to this effect were issued by Persian princes; namely, by Cyrus, in the first year of his reign; by Darius Hystaspes, in his fourth year; by Artaxerxes, to Ezra, as we have just seen; and by the same monarch thirteen years after, when Nehemiah requested a com-

mission from him. Of these four periods, that of Ezra's commission is fixed on as the epoch from which the seventy weeks are to be reckoned; because he was more fully empowered to restore and reform the Jewish state, than any other governor: having, as we have already observed, the power of life and death, of banishment, and confiscation, whereby he was to enforce the law of his God. This mode of computation being promised, the period of seventy weeks is found to accord exactly with it; not only as to the number of years, but as to the very month in which Messiah was "cut off, but not for himself." For the decree of Artaxerxes was given in the first month, and our Lord suffered at the time of the Passover, which from its institution, was always to be kept in the first month of the Jewish year. I wish you now to compare the several parts of this wonderful prediction with their accomplishment in the coming of Christ and in the effects of his meritorious sufferings. You will then perceive that, as the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world, he *finished the transgression, made an end of sins, made reconciliation for iniquity, by the sacrifice of himself, and brought in everlasting righteousness, through his atonement.* Seventy weeks also were determined upon the holy city; that, as our Lord told the woman of Samaria, not in Jerusalem only, nor on Mount Gerizim, should men worship the Father; but that in all the earth, he would be worshiped in spirit and in truth, by such as he should seek, and bring to himself, through the Saviour. The same period of seventy weeks was determined also on the people of Daniel, the Jews, when they should no longer be the peculiar people of God; but when, as St. Peter de-

elares, in every nation, he that feared God and worked righteousness should be accepted with him through Christ. Thus did our Lord, as the Anointed and most Holy, *meet up the vision and prophecy*, both by fulfilling the predictions of the Old Testament, and by establishing the Christian Dispensation, which, as the final revelation of God, is to endure to the end of time. The abolition of the ceremonial law, and the second destruction of Jerusalem are also explicitly foretold in the latter part of this prophecy: the former as resulting from the advent of Christ, in whom all the types and shadows of the Mosaic rites were fulfilled; and the latter as the consequence of his rejection by the house of Israel, through "the overspreading of abominations," by which they had corrupted the moral law, making the word of God of none effect, by the traditions of men. As the wisdom of Daniel was known in all the East, so this remarkable prophecy is supposed to have been circulated also, and to have been preserved by tradition through successive generations. For at the time of our Saviour's birth, there was a general expectation in that part of the world, as to the appearance of some great prince who was to establish universal dominion over mankind.

LETTER XXI.

We are now to pursue the history of the Jews by referring to the book of Nehemiah, who was distinguished at the Persian court as one of the king's cupbearers. It is not known to what tribe he belonged, for he

merely calls himself the son of Hachaliah; but as he mentions Jerusalem as the place of his fathers' sepulchres, it is probable that he was descended from Judah. However this may be, it is certain that he was a person of great piety, prudence, zeal, and patriotism. We are not informed who the enemies were that had broken down the wall, and burned the gates of Jerusalem; nor whether the men who came to Shushan were deputed by Ezra or not, as his name is not mentioned till the beginning of the eighth chapter. We may however infer that the Samaritans, Ammonites, and Moabites, were the oppressors; as their enmity had never been extinguished, though it had been repressed, as to its effects, by the successive decrees of the Persian kings. Nehemiah no sooner heard of the affliction of his people than he resolved on measures for their deliverance; but as he knew that the efforts of man, without the blessing of the Most High, are totally unavailing, he applied, in the first place, by fasting and prayer to the God of Heaven, to grant him mercy in the sight of the king. His confession and supplication on this occasion afford a beautiful model for the imitation of God's people in a time of national calamity; and prove at once the humility and devotion of his own heart. Though Nehemiah had thus committed his way to God, and no doubt with humble confidence as to the issue, yet his grief and anxiety were too poignant to be wholly repressed, even in outward appearance; for when officiating before the king more than three months after, the monarch inquired why his countenance was sad. The first emotion of Nehemiah was fear, which probably arose from the sudden recollection that it was unlawful to appear at court with any mark of sorrow about him;

but he quickly recovered himself, and openly explained the cause of his uneasiness to the king, who desired to know in what manner it could be removed. Nehemiah's conduct on this occasion affords a lovely example for believers "in all things by prayer and supplication to make known their requests unto God;" for before he ventured a reply to the king, he prayed in his heart to the God of Heaven for wisdom to use this providential occasion aright. He doubtless considered this favour of the king as a merciful answer to his former prayer, and was thereby encouraged to proceed in the undertaking he had meditated. Artaxerxes seems to have had a tender regard for Nehemiah; as, by inquiring how long he would be absent, it would appear that it was not without some regret he allowed of his departure. Nehemiah having fixed the time of his return, obtained from the king all his request for repairing and fortifying Jerusalem; and was conveyed thither by a band of horsemen and captains of the king's army, who were sent to do him honour. It is very pleasing to observe how he attributes all his success in this matter to the good hand of his God upon him.

Nehemiah's arrival in the province was soon known, and while it doubtless contributed to raise the drooping spirits of his people, caused great vexation to their enemies. Having delivered the king's letters to the different governors, he remained three days in Jerusalem without pursuing any measures openly; and without having declared the nature and extent of his commission, even to the rulers of the Jews. To prevent the enemies' getting intimation of his designs, he went out privately by night to take a survey of the walls; and having thus satisfied himself as to what was needful to

be done, he spoke to the rulers on the ruinous state of the city, and proposed to them the rebuilding of the wall: telling them how graciously God had assisted him by inclining the heart of the king to grant his request. Actuated by this joyful intelligence, the whole council agreed to his proposal, and prepared for the execution of it. The enemies no sooner found what the Jews were about to do than they began to revile them; and inquired whether they meant to rebuild the wall in order to rebel against the king; but Nehemiah answered them that he was acting under the sanction of divine authority, and was therefore secure of protection from that God, in whom they had no portion. Nehemiah having prepared for the building, the priests, Levites, nobles, and people, went earnestly to work; each ruler taking upon himself the charge of a certain portion, so that the work should be carried on in all parts of the wall at the same time. The enemies of the Jews at first spent their rage in bitter sarcasms; but when they found that the wall was raised in all parts to half its height, their malice was inflamed to such a degree, that they threatened to unite together and destroy it. Nehemiah, however, and those who feared the Lord, committed themselves and their undertaking to his protection, and having set a watch day and night, continued the work. The threats of the enemy, as might be expected, had considerable influence on the people in general, who urged, as a pretext for quitting the work, that their strength was exhausted in clearing away the rubbish. The adversaries did all in their power to increase this discouragement, threatening to fall unawares upon the builders; and sending those Jews who lived near them to spread alarming

reports in the city. Nehemiah still undauntedly continued the work: arming the people, that they might be ready to defend themselves; and exhorting them not to fear, but to remember that their God was great and terrible. One half of the soldiers who came with him he employed in building, while the others kept watch, and held weapons ready for the people, in case of an attack. The nobles and rulers constantly remained with the people, to encourage them by their presence; and every man had his sword girded by his side. By these wise precautions, and by unremitted vigilance on the part of Nehemiah and his followers, they were enabled to continue the building, which, through God's blessing, went on prosperously, to the no small mortification of the opponents.

The burden of fatigue and apprehension sustained by the people was not their only grievance at this time: many of them complained to Nehemiah that their rich brethren oppressed them, by taking usury; so that not only their lands and vineyards were mortgaged, but their sons and daughters were brought into bondage; without their having a hope of being able to redeem them. Nehemiah was greatly displeased at this intelligence, and calling an assembly, he set before the nobles the guilt of their unfeeling conduct towards their brethren, and exhorted them to desist from it, as contrary to the law of God.* Neither he, nor any of his followers, he told them, exacted any thing from the people; and, in compliance with his example, they could not do less than restore all they had taken. The nobles immediately consented to his requisition, and he confirmed their promise by a solemn oath and denun-

* Leviticus xxv. 35—37.

ciation, to which all the people assented, praising the Lord for this mercy also. Nehemiah takes this occasion of noticing his own disinterested conduct, in sustaining all the expense of his government out of his own private fortune; not because he wishes to expatiate on his own good deeds, but because it was desirable that his example should be known, in order to influence others. When all parts of the wall were built, and the gates only remained to be set up, Nehemiah was again assailed by the machinations of his subtle enemies, who first endeavoured to entice him out of the city, and when that device failed, sent to inform him that he was accused of rebellion. Their intentions were readily perceived by him, and he returned an answer accordingly: ascribing the whole to their malicious desires to render his efforts abortive. Still confiding in the strength of God, Nehemiah was enabled to withstand all attempts from without, and all conspiracies within the city; and though the enemies hired false prophets to intimidate him, he refused to follow their counsel, or take any extraordinary measures for his personal safety, declaring that he did not believe them to be sent by God. This courageous behaviour of the governor doubtless animated the people, and at the end of fifty-two days their work was completed; the wall was built, and the doors were set up; the singers and the Levites were appointed in their places, and a solemn dedication of the work was made with great rejoicing. Great sacrifices were offered also on this occasion by the rulers and people, because God had made them to rejoice with great joy. Nor was this feeling confined only to those who had toiled in the building, for their wives also and children rejoiced: "so that the

joy of Jerusalem was heard even afar off." Nehemiah's next care was to appoint two faithful and pious nobles to keep the city, with a strict charge to have the gates shut, and to appoint a regular succession of watchmen, chosen from among the inhabitants. The duty of guarding so large a city fell rather heavily on them, as their number was small in comparison to the extent of it. To remedy this, Nehemiah determined to reckon the people by their genealogies, and then to make some regulation by which the population of the city should be increased and the waste parts of it rebuilt. But as the wall was not finished and dedicated till the end of the sixth month, he was obliged to defer his measures for a time, on account of the solemn assemblies held in the seventh month. The first of these was the feast of trumpets, celebrated on the first day of the month. On this occasion the people requested Ezra to read to them the law of Moses "which the Lord had commanded to Israel." The assembly was held in one of the principal streets of the city, in the open air, and must have afforded a sight no less gratifying than solemn and imposing. Ezra stood on a platform raised above the people, with several of the priests on either hand. When he opened the book all the people stood up, and when he blessed the Lord, they responded a solemn "amen," lifting up their hands and bowing their heads in humble adoration. Ezra continued reading from morning till midday, while the people listened with the utmost attention; and many of the Levites dispersed among them, explained the sense, and caused them to understand the reading. The hearts of the people were evidently prepared for the reception of God's word, and the conviction of their sinfulness caused them to shed tears of

repentance. Nehemiah, Ezra, and the Levites, comforted them, and enjoined that they should keep that day as one of holy rejoicing in the strength and aid of God, whereby they were not only restored to their town-land, but had the privilege of assembling for his worship, and the benefit of hearing and understanding his word. On the following day, not only the Levites, but the heads of families among the people also, repaired to Ezra to receive farther instruction in the law of God. In the course of their reading, they found the ordinance of the feast of tabernacles,* and prepared to celebrate it accordingly: sending forth a proclamation to the people that they should dwell in booths during seven days. The inhabitants of Jerusalem and of all the land who were then assembled in the city, went forth and gathered branches for this purpose: the former making them on the flat roofs of their houses, the latter setting them up in the court of the temple, and in the principal streets. During the seven days that this feast lasted, the people showed an increasing desire to hear the word of God, and Ezra read it to them daily. Nehemiah tells us there was great gladness during this festival, which had not been thus observed since the days of Joshua the son of Nun. How we are to account for any change made respecting this ordinance, especially in the times of David and Solomon, is difficult to determine. Perhaps some other than the literal sense had been put upon the passage, by which the making of booths had been set aside. Between the feast of trumpets on the first day of the month, and that of tabernacles on the fifteenth, fell the great day of atonement on the tenth. We are not here told that it was observed:

* Leviticus xxiii. 39—43.

But there is every reason to suppose that Ezra knew of the appointment; and in that case he would doubtless enjoin the observance of it. However this may be, the twenty-fourth day of the month was fixed on for a solemn fast; most probably because many of the people were desirous of returning to their several cities. On this occasion the people confessed their sins and iniquities; with supplication to God, one fourth part of the day; and employed a similar portion of it in hearing his word. After this the Levites cried with a loud voice unto the Lord their God, and called upon the people to stand up and bless him. Then they began to set forth his glorious perfections as the Lord and Creator of all things, and to enumerate his mercies to the people of Israel from the calling of Abram. This chapter (the ninth of Nehemiah) contains a beautiful epitome of the Jewish history, with a confession of national sins, and an acknowledgment of God's merciful forbearance, and righteous dealings towards his rebellious people. I recommend you to read it very attentively; and to picture to yourself the occasion on which it was used, when every individual composing the vast assembly must have felt that his own personal guilt helped to make up the aggregate of national iniquity. We are too apt to regard our sins as injurious to ourselves alone; not considering in how many ways they may become so to others, who, swayed by our influence or example, may extend the ban around their several spheres also; and thus make us the ministers of evil to many whom we have never known. Those who have lived many years in this world, if they are instructed by the good Spirit of God, will feel and know that they have been rebellious like the Israelites, and have "wrought great provocations," by

departing from God, and setting up idols in their hearts : and they will acknowledge the forbearance and mercy of the Lord in delivering them " many times," so that they have not been utterly consumed in the midst of their sins ; but are still blessed with the means of grace and salvation. When the Levites had finished their confession, they entered into a solemn covenant in the name of the whole nation, to dedicate themselves to the Lord. This covenant, as a public act, was written and attested by the governor, the priests, the Levites, and the nobles ; while the people gave a solemn assent to it, and " entered into a curse and an oath to walk in God's law, which was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the Lord ;" to avoid all those national transgressions which had brought his judgments upon them, and to observe all the ordinances of his worship and service, towards which they agreed to contribute a yearly rate of half a shekel for each person. When this solemnity was ended, and the people were about to depart and settle again in their respective towns and villages, Nehemiah prevailed on the rulers to take up their future abode in Jerusalem. This induced many others to offer themselves willingly, for the re peopling of the city, by which they gained the blessing and good will of the inhabitants. Among the rest of the people, every tenth man was taken by lot, and obliged to build a house and settle with his family within the walls. By these means Jerusalem became very populous ; and, being rebuilt in all parts, and adorned by the more opulent inhabitants, recovered no small share of its ancient splendour. Thus did the people again dwell at ease ; their walls afforded them security against their enemies, and their God, to

whom they had returned by repentance, was their strength and their shield. He had caused the waste places of Judah to be inhabited, "the streets of Jerusalem to be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times."*

LETTER XXII.

WHEN Nehemiah reckoned the people according to their genealogies, he found it necessary to exclude several of the priests, whose register could not be found, to prove that they really were descendants of Aaron; telling them that they must no more officiate in holy things, nor partake of the offerings, unless it should please God to raise up a priest or prophet, by whom his will concerning them should be made known. After this, Nehemiah appointed the priests, Levites, singers, and Nethinims to serve in the temple, according to their courses: choosing from among them officers to superintend the treasures, offerings, and tithes, which the people brought gladly for the support of God's ministers.

Nehemiah remained twelve years in his government, during which time he effectually reformed all abuses, and maintained the laws and ordinances of God according to their original constitution. In these measures, however, he had not the hearty concurrence of all the rulers, for in the early part of his administration, many of the nobles held a secret correspondence with Tobiah, the Ammonite, who was allied by marriage to two of the principal families of Judah. As soon, therefore, as Ne-

* Daniel ix. 25.

Nehemiah returned into Persia, this stranger, an inveterate enemy of the Jews, was not only admitted into the city, but had apartments assigned him in the temple by Eliashib the priest, who had also formed an alliance with him. Nehemiah having obtained a second commission from Artaxerxes, came again to Jerusalem about five years after his departure. It was not long before he discovered the profanation of the temple by the admission of Tobiah to reside in it; nor was he remiss in putting an end to the evil, which his office of governor enabled him to do, without the concurrence of Eliashib. He turned out the furniture from the apartments, and having caused them to be cleansed, restored them to their original use of store rooms for the Levites, singers and porters. This was not the only evil he had to reform; for the Levites and singers who performed the service of the temple, had not been supplied with their daily portions, which had been withheld from them, either by the covetousness of the priests, or the neglect of the people; and the consequence was, that they had retired to their several homes, where they could procure food. The pious governor was much grieved at this neglect of the temple service; and justly censured the conduct of the rulers, in allowing the house of God to be thus forsaken. He settled the Levites once more in their several offices; and appointed men of piety and integrity among their brethren, and the priests, to superintend the distribution of their daily portions. Where, ever public worship is disregarded, the law of God is speedily forgotten, or carelessly observed at best; and this was now the case in Jerusalem; for the inhabitants made no scruple of pursuing their customary employments, and buying and selling on the sabbath day.

Strangers also from Tyre were privileged to dwell in the city, and to carry on their traffic; and the people of Jerusalem and Judah bought of them on the sabbath day also. Nehemiah again admonished the rulers (who, if they did not sanction these practices, used no means to repress them), and set before them the evil they were bringing on the nation; by allowing themselves or others to commit those sins by which their forefathers had incurred the awful visitations of God's righteous displeasure. To put an end to this impious practice, Nehemiah ordered the gates of Jerusalem to be shut just before the commencement of the sabbath; and not to be re-opened till it was over. The buyers and sellers; however, were so regardless of the law, or so intent on their illegal traffic, that many of them lodged without the city, in order to carry it on. The vigilance of Nehemiah soon discovered and abolished this practice also. He threatened to punish those who were guilty of it; and appointed a guard of Levites about the gates to prevent the future profanation of the sabbath in this way. In the course of reading the law (which it would appear was appointed at regular intervals), it was found written that the children of Israel were not to intermarry with the Moabites or Ammonites. Nehemiah took occasion from thence to proceed in a work of great difficulty, which arose from a growing evil, not to be repressed without great care and caution. Among those who had at various times embraced the Jewish religion, were persons of several different nations, who are frequently mentioned in Scripture as "the mixed multitude." With the descendants of these proselytes, the Jews were allowed to intermarry, according to prescribed regulations; if they continued in the faith their ancestors

had embraced. This privilege had doubtless been continually abused : for the people of Israel are frequently upbraided by the prophets for making alliances with the heathen ; and in the time of Ezra's government, he obliged them to put away their strange wives. Notwithstanding a reform in this particular had been so forcibly enacted, and during the first government of Nehemiah, had doubtless been adhered to, his absence was the occasion of which many had availed themselves to infringe his regulations. Not only had they married unconverted women of Ammon and Moab, but had taken wives from among the Philistines, with whom they were never, under any circumstances, to make marriages, or any covenant whatever.*

Nehemiah reproved and punished those who had been guilty of this transgression ; and exacted an oath of the congregation, that they would in future avoid it : adducing the declension it had caused even to Solomon, who was in other respects reputed the wisest of men ; and who had been " beloved of his God." As this evil was not confined to the people or nobles only, but had even found its way into the family of the high priest, Nehemiah thought proper to make an example of one of the sons of Joiada, who had married a daughter of Sanballat, the Horonite, by expelling him from the congregation. It is surprising that any of the Jewish nation could make an alliance with a man who was so evidently their enemy as Sanballat ; and it would be more surprising to find this alliance existing in the family of the high priest, did we not know that he had lost the dignity and authority belonging to his sacred office, by the commission of a similar offence

* Deuteronomy vii. 1-4. Judges iii. 1-4.

himself. Nehemiah tells us that all the "*mixed multitude*" were at this time separated from Israel; by which it is inferred that they were enrolled in such a manner, according to their descent and the time of their having become proselytes, that it might be clearly ascertained at what period they could be admitted to all the privileges of the children of Israel.*

This act of Nehemiah's is the last he has recorded of his government; but we are not to conclude that this, or the other circumstances related in his thirteenth chapter, took place immediately after his return: as a considerable time would be requisite for bringing them about. The period of his death is uncertain; but he is supposed to have lived more than twenty years after his second commission, and consequently to have survived his royal master, Artaxerxes, which may account for his not being recalled to the Persian court. No mention is made of Ezra after the return of Nehemiah; it is therefore probable that he died during the absence of the governor: for we cannot suppose that the neglect of God's worship, and the profanation of the temple, would have been suffered by him, had he been alive. The book of Nehemiah is the last of the historical books of Scripture which can be relied on as authentic.† The character of the writer shines forth so conspicuously throughout his writings, that we cannot fail to notice and admire his eminent virtues; and it will be well for us if we endeavour to imitate them also: ever remembering, that firm trust in God, and fervent devotion to his service, formed the basis of them. The prophet Malachi is considered to have been contemporary with Nehemiah, because he reproves the Jews for neglecting and profaning the service and temple of God; and

* See Note I.

† i. e. the last in chronological order.

especially addresses the priests who had departed from the covenant, so recently entered into by them. His vices* also from which he exhorts the nation to turn by repentance, are not open rebellion and idolatry; but such as Nehemiah sought to reform; such as belong to a people who retain something like a form of godliness, while they totally neglect the power of it. Malachi predicted the calling of the Gentiles,† the mission of John the Baptist, who should come in the spirit and power of Elijah,‡ as the messenger of the Lord, to announce his approach, and to prepare the people by repentance, for his reception. He also declared that the Lord, the expected Saviour, should suddenly come to his temple,§ and should establish a glorious kingdom, in which truth and righteousness, mercy and peace, should prevail; in which a holy worship and a pure offering should be offered to the Lord of hosts.

Malachi is the last of the prophets, and his book closes the canonical writings of the Old Testament. Do not let my cursory remarks on it suffice; but read and study it for yourself. Whatever notice I have taken of the prophetic writings has been intended to excite your desire to examine them, and to supply you with the means of doing so, rather than with a pretext for neglecting them. Make the whole word of God your study, and seek by prayer, for that right understanding of it, which the Holy Spirit alone can impart. Then will your perception of its sublimity, beauty, truth, and dignity, correspond with that of the Psalmists; then will you have great delight in God's word, and will be

* Malachi i. 6—10, 12—14. ii. 1—17. iii. 15—5.

† Malachi i. 11.

‡ Malachi iv. 5, 6. iii. 1.

§ Malachi iv. 6.

|| Malachi iii. 1 (latter part.) iv. 2.

¶ Psalm xix. 7—10.

able to declare (though it may be at the end of a long life, replete with trials and sufferings) "Thy word is tried to the uttermost; and thy servant loveth it."*

LETTER XXIII.

As we are now come to the end of the Old Testament, I am desirous of directing your attention to some particulars respecting it, which may be no less profitable in the way of illustration, than gratifying as the source of information. When the Jews, at the time of Nehemiah's first visit, called upon Ezra to bring the book of the law to read to them, it is evident that they had been for a long time deprived of the blessed privilege of hearing the word of God: and that far from having it continually in their hearts, or making it the subject of discourse and instruction in their families,† they were, for the most part, totally ignorant of it. The neglect into which the word of God had fallen long before the captivity may be inferred from the idolatry and iniquity so continually prevalent in Judah: and the scarcity of copies of the law is plainly declared by the surprise of Hilkiah on finding one in the house of the Lord; and by the grief of Josiah, when he heard the words of the law.‡ This prince reigned thirteen years after this event, and it is not to be doubted that he caused copies to be written and distributed among the priests and Levites, that they might teach the people. When the Jews were carried away into Babylon, they were not

* Psalm cxix. 140.

† Deuteronomy vi. 6—9.

‡ 2 Chron. xxxiv. 15—19.

without copies of all the sacred writings: for Daniel evidently refers not only to the law, but to the historical and prophetical books of scripture;* and when they returned from captivity under Zerubbabel and Jeshua, the altar was set up, and the ordinances observed according to the written law of Moses: the priests also ministered in their courses, as appointed by David king of Israel.† These circumstances prove that copies of the holy scriptures were extant before the time of Ezra; but they were not generally accessible to the people, because the number of them was small; and the character in which they were written (the ancient Hebrew) had been disused by them during the captivity. Ezra, who had prepared his heart to teach the law of the Lord, found it needful to collect all the parts of the sacred scriptures, to arrange them, and to write them in the Chaldee character, that they might be brought into general use; and become the means of preserving the people from those miseries, which the neglect of them had brought upon them. A work of so much labour, added to his public administration of the government, must have occupied several years; and it is probable he had not long completed it when Nehemiah arrived; soon after which, by the desire of the people, he began the public reading of it. The priests and Levites; at this time, “caused the people to understand the law, gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading;” and this manner of instructing them was afterwards continued, for Ezra divided the law into fifty-four sections,‡ one of which was appointed to be

* Daniel ix.

† Ezra iii. 10.

‡ The intercalary year contained fifty-four Sabbaths; for which this provision was made. In the intermediate years two sections

read every sabbath day. From this time, also, must the erection of synagogues be dated; for as the people were to assemble in their several cities to hear these public readings; houses for that purpose would be absolutely necessary in the winter season. The manner of reading the portion appointed for each sabbath was this:—First, a verse was read in the original Hebrew; then it was interpreted, by an appointed minister, into the Chaldee; and lastly, the sense was explained by another person, who was one of the readers.* The division of the sacred scriptures into verses is supposed to have been made about the time of Ezra, for the more convenient interpretation of them, period by period. This reading of the law was continued during many years, till it was prohibited by Antiochus Epiphanes; and then sections of the prophets were substituted for it. But when the Jews were afterwards delivered from his persecution, and the law was restored, the reading of it was resumed, as a first lesson; and the section from the prophets retained, as a second lesson. That both were thus read in the synagogues in the time of our Lord and his apostles is evident, from several passages in the New Testament.† The great work of Ezra was the setting forth a correct and complete edition of the Hebrew Scriptures, as far as the book which bears his name. In all of which he doubtless had the special guidance of God's Holy Spirit: for as "all scripture is given by inspiration of God," for the use of his church; so has it been preserved from error and the corruptions of men, in all ages, by his Spirit; as well as were joined together, several times; so as to complete the reading of the whole, in the course of the year.

* See Note J.

† Luke iv. 16. Acts xiii. 15.

rescued from their enemy, and attempts to destroy it, by his providence. The Jews reckoned the number of the books of scripture, which were of divine authority, to be twenty-two. But they did this merely to make it agree with the number of letters in their alphabet: counting several (the twelve minor prophets for instance) as one book. According to the list given by Josephus, they consisted of the same as those in our translation of the Old Testament; though not arranged in the same order. The law, consisting of the five books of Moses, had the first place; the second was occupied by the prophets, which included all the other books of the Old Testament, except the Psalms, the Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon: these four, under the title of Holy Writings,* were placed last. When the scriptures of the Old Testament were divided into verses, they were not, as at present, distinguished by numerical figures. This, as well as their division into chapters,† is a modern improvement, the origin of which is as follows. Cardinal Hugo, who flourished about the year 1240, was much engaged in the study of the holy scriptures; on which he wrote a Commentary. In the course of his work the usefulness of a concordance occurred to him, and he consequently invented the first book of that kind. With the assistance of the monks of his order,‡ he soon completed this useful work, in the application of which he found it needful to divide the sacred books into sections; and this was the origin of the chapters, as we now have them. These sections

* These four were called by the general name of *psalms*, and as such are referred to by our Lord. See Luke xxiv. 44.

† The psalms were always divided as they now are.

‡ He had been a Dominican monk.

the Cardinal subdivided into smaller portions, to which he referred by the first seven letters of the alphabet, using all of them when the chapter was long, and only some of them when it was shorter. When this Concordance was published, all who desired to use it divided their bibles as he had done, to make them agree with it. About the year 1430, a famous Jewish rabbi, named Isaac Nathan or Mordecai Nathan, being conversant with many learned christians, and frequently disputing with them, came to the knowledge of Hugo's Concordance, which by this time had been greatly improved by other hands. The benefit of this work was so apparent, that he determined to have one for the use of the Jews; and accordingly began a Concordance to the Hebrew Bible, which he finished in seven years. He followed the plan of Hugo, in dividing the sacred books into chapters; but he made an improvement on the subdivisions: using for them the ancient verses, to which he now affixed numerical figures. This work of Rabbi Nathan was finished just after the invention of printing, by means of which it came into general use among the Jews; and it had the same effect on the Hebrew Bible as Hugo's Concordance had on the Latin, by causing the division of the several books into chapters. Nathan's improvement, of numerical figures, with the ancient verses, was soon after adopted into the Latin Bible; and the Greek New Testament underwent divisions and subdivisions similar to those of the Old Testament, in order to make it agree with a Concordance published about the same time by Stephanus.

Such is the account of the order and arrangement of our bibles, as we now have them. Of course I need not tell you when and how we obtained the blessing of read-

ing and hearing in our own tongue the precious word of God. But I would have you observe how wonderfully Jews and christians, Roman catholics and protestants have been rendered instrumental in carrying on that work of God, by which we may hope, ere long, the whole world will be evangelized, according to his gracious promises.

LETTER XXIV.

As we have no longer the authority of the sacred scriptures for our guide, we must henceforth be content with such information as can be obtained from the apocryphal writers, and others, who have transmitted to us the histories of the several kingdoms to which the people of Israel were tributary, after their return from Babylon.

No specific history of the Jews was written at this time: that by Josephus was not composed till after the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus; and consequently not before the seventieth year of the christian era. He is an author not to be implicitly relied on, as he states many facts which common sense must reject; and many others which must have happened, as to time and manner, very differently to his account of them.

Artaxerxes Longimanus died in the forty-first year of his reign; about four years after Nehemiah obtained his second commission. He was succeeded by his son Xerxes, who retained the crown only forty-five days; being murdered by his brother Sogdianus. This unnatural conduct, with some other atrocities of Sogdianus, having rendered him hateful to his people, he sought to destroy the rest of his brothers, lest any of

them should be raised to the throne. One of them, named Ochus, gaining some intimation of his designs, raised an army, and being supported by the principal nobility and governors of provinces, deposed Sogdianus, and put him to death; to avenge, as he said, the death of Xerxes. Ochus having thus obtained the crown, changed his name to Darius; to which historians have added the surname of Nothus. I shall not relate the events of his reign, any farther than our principal subject demands. Nehemiah, as I have before intimated, was left in the undisturbed possession of his government, to carry on the reformation of the Jewish church and state: Eliashib the high priest, after having held his office forty years, died in the eleventh year of Darius, and was succeeded by his son Joiada. About this time Egypt revolted from the Persians under Amyrtæus, who made himself king of that country. Nevertheless, according to the declaration of God, by the prophet Ezekiel, it never became eminent as before; but continued a "base kingdom" during fifty years only, when it was again brought into subjection to Persia.

The completion of Nehemiah's reform is placed in the fifteenth year of Darius Nothus, and is very properly considered as a fulfilment of Daniel's prophecy of *seven weeks*;* for from the appointment of Ezra to this work of restoration, till the year above-mentioned, was exactly forty-nine years. To this period also must be referred the building of the Samaritan temple; on Mount Gerizim; for on the expulsion of Manasseh the son of Joiada, who had married the daughter of Samballat, he took refuge with his father-in-law; and it is inferred that many other Jews who had married strange women,

* Daniel ix. 25.

or were otherwise disaffected to the government of Nebuchadnezzar, followed his example. Sanballat, who was governor of Samaria, having by this means a sort of Levitical priesthood, determined to build a temple similar to that at Jerusalem; hoping no doubt to lessen the influence, and undermine the authority of the legitimate pontiffs, which he had vainly attempted to destroy. He accordingly obtained a grant from Darius; and having erected a temple, made Manasseh high priest, and established a form of worship corresponding externally to that observed at Jerusalem. From this time Samaria became a place of refuge for such Jews as were accused of infringing the law; so that in process of time most of the inhabitants were the descendants of those apostates who had intermarried with the Samaritans. One circumstance, however, is to be noticed: this preponderance of Jewish inhabitants conducted to the banishment of idolatry from Samaria; for whereas the worship of idols was formerly joined to that of the true God; the building of the temple, and the introduction of the sacred scriptures (at least of the five books of Moses), were rendered effectual to the destruction of idolatry.*

The building of this temple on Mount Gerizim, and the encouragement given to renegade Jews in Samaria, tended to increase that hatred towards the Samaritans which had originated in their opposition to the Jews at the time of their return from Babylon; and had been perpetuated by a continued series of vexatious attempts on their part ever since. The animosity of the Jews arose to such a height, that they pronounced a curse, not only on the inhabitants of Samaria, but on every

* See Note K.

thing belonging to them; making it unlawful for a Jew to hold any intercourse with them, or to partake of any food which was the produce of their land. This fact will show you in a strong point of view that the Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans; and will explain that question asked by the woman at Jacob's well. "How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest water of me, who am a woman of Samaria?"

After Nehemiah, it does not appear that any governor was appointed in Judea by the Persians: it is therefore concluded that the prefect of Syria ruled there in matters relating to the king; but that the internal government was left to the high priest, according to the privileges obtained by Ezra and his successor. Darius Nothus died after a reign of nineteen years, and was succeeded by his son Artaxerxes, whom the Greeks called Mnemon, on account of his excellent memory. There is a total silence as to the affairs of the Jews at this time, during thirty-two years, at the end of which is placed the death of Joiada, after he had held his office forty years. He was succeeded by his son Johanan, or Jonathan. It may be inferred that the people had abated much of their zeal for God's law; and that the priests thought more of their own advancement than of his honour; if we may judge by the conduct of Johanan and his brother towards each other. Jeashua's ambition, inciting him to desire his brother's office, he courted the friendship of Bagoses, the governor of Syria, and prevailed on him to order the deposition of Johanan, and the appointment of himself to be high priest. When he had obtained this grant he went to Jerusalem, and immediately attempted to put it into effect. Johanan strenuously opposed him; and the contention

between them rose to such a height, that, unmindful of their holy character, as priests of the Lord, and regardless of the sacredness of his temple, Jeshua was slain in the inner court of it, by the hand of his brother. Bagoses, hearing of this, came in great anger to Jerusalem, to take cognisance of the fact. When he was about to enter the temple, the priests objected that, as a Gentile, he could not be admitted, since it would be accounted a profanation of the place. Bagoses very properly replied, that the place in which so horrible a murder had been committed could suffer no defilement by his presence; as a living man could not be more impure than a mangled corpse. The priests were unable to refute this reasoning; and the prefect entering the temple, laid a fine of fifty drachmas on every lamb offered there. This fine was considered as a grievous burden by the Jews; and it might well be so, in a twofold sense: first, as rendering their sacrifices very expensive; and secondly, as reminding them continually of their subjection to a foreign power. To the more pious among them would be added a deep humiliation also; for the dreadful event which gave rise to it. It is somewhat astonishing that Johanan continued to officiate as high priest after this; but we must conclude that he held, in that character, the supreme authority; and was not therefore amenable to any judicature superior to his own. The fine on the temple was paid during seven years, at the end of which time the death of Artaxerxes caused a change in the appointment of governors; and Bagoses no longer remained in Syria to exact it. The next king of Persia was named Ochus; he gained the throne by a series of crimes, which rendered him hateful to his subjects, and

caused many of the provinces to revolt at the beginning of his reign. The Persian empire was now drawing near to its end; for the prince of Grecia, who was to subdue it, was born at Pella, in Macedonia, in the third year of Ochus. In the eighth year of this monarch, a revolt of the Sidonians and other Phœnicians, brought him, with a large army, into their country; with the design of subduing them before he marched against Egypt. The Grecian mercenaries, who aided the Sidonians, terrified at the approach of Ochus, purchased their own safety by betraying the city; and the wretched inhabitants, fearing to fall into the hands of the merciless tyrant, set fire to their own houses, and perished in them, to the number of forty thousand. The Jews are supposed to have had some share in this revolt of the Phœnicians; for after the destruction of Sidon, the king marched into Judea, took Jericho, and making many of them captives, dispersed them into Egypt and Hyrcania.

In the following year Ochus succeeded in bringing Egypt once more under the Persian yoke; and it has never since that time been an independent kingdom, ruled by a sovereign of its own; but has been successively governed by the Greeks, Romans, and Turks. It has not any more exalted itself above the nations, for God has diminished it, according to his declaration by the prophet Ezekiel. Johanan, the high priest, dying in the eighteenth year of Ochus, his office devolved on Jaddua his son. After Ochus had subdued Egypt, and brought under the other provinces which had revolted, he gave himself up to sloth and luxury; leaving the affairs of the empire in the hands of his two favourite officers. One of these, named Bagoas, who

was by birth an Egyptian; taking great offence at the manner in which the religion and laws of his country had been violated by Ochus, contrived to put him to death by poison, after he had reigned twenty-one years. Resentment, however, was not the only motive of his conduct; ambition also excited in him the desire of reigning; and, in order to gratify this passion, he killed all the sons of Ochus, except the youngest, named Arses, whom he placed on the throne as a nominal king. The reign of this prince was very short; for Bagoas, finding that he was acquainted with all his crimes, and preparing to punish them, took immediate measures to prevent his doing so, by putting him to death also. About the same time died Philip of Macedon, not long after he had been appointed generalissimo of the Grecian army appointed to invade Persia. He was succeeded, in his kingdom and command, by his son Alexander, then twenty years of age. The vacant throne of Persia was filled by Darius Codomanus, who was a descendant of Darius Nothus, but not the son of any king of Persia: Bagoas having slain all the royal family. The character of this prince was quite different to that of his predecessors; he was distinguished for valour, gentleness, and generosity; and might have proved a blessing to the empire, had not the time of blessing been past. Crimes of the deepest dye had stained the annals of Persia, and the measure of her iniquity being great, proportionable judgments were about to be assigned her. A virtuous and noble-minded prince was not the sort of tool Bagoas wanted; and he consequently prepared a poisonous draught to get rid of him. Darius, however, being apprised of his design, compelled him to drink it himself, and thus put an end

his future schemes. The new monarch was scarcely settled on his throne before he had to encounter the rigours of war, and to oppose an impetuous enemy, the person of Alexander of Macedon, who crossed the Hellespont at the head of the Grecian forces in the second year of Darius.

LETTER XXV.

I do not intend to follow the victorious course of Alexander, by a recital of the events which marked it. The account of them must be frequently in your hands; and I doubt not that the interest they excite in young minds, has tended to fix them in your memory. My desire at present is, that you should regard them in a new point of view: that is, in connexion with many prophecies, of which they became the literal completion. The first I shall notice is that in the second chapter of Daniel, where among the four universal empires, that of Greece is described as "the third kingdom of brass, which should bear rule over the whole earth." But, a more accurate and full description of the progress, extent, and duration of this kingdom is given in the eighth chapter of the same prophet; where not only a vision of the future was displayed to him, but an interpretation of the vision itself, was afforded by the angel Gabriel. I wish you now to study this chapter, as far as the end of the twenty-second verse; and then to compare it with what you know of the character and achievements of Alexander. You cannot fail to be impressed with their singular correspondence to each

ether. The power of the Persian dominion, described as a ram, pushing without restraint in all directions, illustrates the despotic authority which the kings and governors exercised over all the nations under their sway; and which became, under vicious princes, a most insufferable tyranny. Alexander was properly the first king of Grecia; for he was the first who obtained the general suffrage of all the estates: effecting by the terror of his arms alone, what his father had scarcely brought about by policy, bribes, and compulsion. The impetuous temper of Alexander was well known, not only to his enemies, but to his dearest friends, who frequently experienced the fatal effects of it; and the rapidity of his marches, as described by historians, was such, that he came upon his enemies unawares, before they had time to take any measures for defence or resistance. Now look at the description of him in the prediction, as coming from the west, with such speed as scarcely to touch the ground, and traversing the whole earth in that direction; as casting down to the ground the power of Persia, wherein was no strength to resist him; and with whom was found none that could deliver out of his hand. It is I think scarcely needful to point out to you the meaning of the eighth verse, in which the progressive greatness and premature death of the victor are foretold; as well as the partition of his empire. But these predictions of Daniel were not the only ones which had their completion in the conquests of Alexander. There were others of Isaiah, Ezekiel, &c. respecting some of the people who inhabited Syria and Palestine, which had not been fully accomplished by former conquerors. The most remarkable among them were the predictions of utter

ruin to Tyre, which were recorded with the utmost precision. In the taking of that city by Nebuchadnezzar, the ruin of it was not effected; because the inhabitants found means to remove their wealth, and thereby secured the means of rising from a temporary depression, and building a new city. But it was far otherwise with Tyre when taken by Alexander; though the siege lasted only seven months. His impetuous rage at being detained before this place, knew no bounds when he had made himself master of it: he not only burned the city, but destroyed a great number of the inhabitants, and sold the rest, amounting to thirty thousand, for slaves. When he had thus satiated his vengeance, he caused the city to be rebuilt; and peopled it with colonies drawn from the neighbouring countries.

It was during this siege of Tyre, that the Jews gave serious offence to Alexander; and were by him doomed to destruction for it. But the same God who had raised him up as a scourge for the nations, designed him as a protector to his people; and by a wonderful interposition, turned his rage into humble adoration: causing, in this instance also, "the wrath of man to praise him." The Tyrians who were constantly occupied in commerce, and not at all given to agriculture, drew their sustenance chiefly from Samaria and Judea: countries celebrated for their fruitfulness. Alexander, on sitting down before Tyre, sent to demand supplies for his army from these quarters; and was furnished with them by the Samaritans. But the Jews, having sworn fealty to Darius, desired to be excused on that account; as they could not obey any other master during his life; nor violate their allegiance towards

him, by aiding his enemies. Alexander had no sooner completed the destruction of Tyre than he began his march towards Jerusalem, fully intent on the vengeance he had so long meditated. The Jews, hearing of his approach, were in the utmost consternation; but remembering the former mercies of the Lord, and his promises to deliver them out of trouble; they made their devout supplications unto him; and cast themselves entirely on his mercy. He who had never said to the house of Israel, "Seek ye my face," in vain, now vouchsafed to be found of them; and to grant the mercy they implored. He directed Jaddua, in a vision, to go forth from Jerusalem and meet Alexander; desiring him to put on his pontifical robes and to take with him the priests, habited according to their office; and all the people, in white garments. In compliance with these commands, Jaddua went forth the following day, and advancing to an eminence without Jerusalem, named Sapha, there awaited the king's approach. When Alexander appeared in sight; the whole procession, with Jaddua at their head, went forward to meet him. The king no sooner beheld the high priest than he was struck with awe and reverence; and, to the astonishment of multitudes on both sides, bowed down and saluted him with religious veneration. Parmenio demanded an explanation of this extraordinary conduct; and inquired of the king why he, whom all adored, should thus worship the high priest of the Jews. Alexander replied, that he did not offer this adoration to Jaddua, but to that God whose priest he was. He then declared that when he was at Dium in Macedonia, deliberating on the invasion of Persia, and in some doubt as to the success of it; this very priest, dressed

exactly as they saw him, had appeared to him in a dream, and encouraged him to proceed in his undertaking, by promising that God would direct and prosper him in it; and give him power to subdue the whole Persian empire. The actual presence of Jaddua, he added, now assured him that he was really guided in his enterprise by God; and should therefore certainly succeed in it, as he had promised. After this explanation the king embraced Jaddua; and, going with him to Jerusalem, offered sacrifices in the temple. While he remained in the city, Jaddua showed him the prophecies of Daniel, wherein a Grecian prince was spoken of, as appointed to overthrow the Persian empire. This served as a farther encouragement to assure him of entire success, and made him so well satisfied with his visit to Jerusalem, that before his departure he called the people together, and desired to know what favour they had to ask of him. They begged him to allow them the free exercise of their own laws, civil and religious, and an exemption from tribute once in seven years; when they were forbidden to cultivate their land, or gather in the fruits of it. These privileges were readily accorded by Alexander, who left the city, to pursue his enterprises; not doubting that he was the person alluded to in the prophecies, that had been shown him. Alexander had scarcely left Jerusalem when a deputation from the Samaritans waited on him, to request that he would honour their city and temple with his presence. When he had demanded supplies for his army, they had not only furnished them without delay, but had also sent eight thousand men to be employed in his service. They were greatly disappointed that he had not inflicted his threatened vengeance on Jerusalem; and

still more so when they heard that he had not only spared, but favoured their rivals, the Jews. Similar honours and privileges, at least, were expected by them, in return for their ready submission; but Alexander excused himself for the present, by the urgency of his affairs: promising to visit them, if possible, on his return from Egypt, whither he was then hastening. The deputies then begged the same exemption from tribute as he had granted the Jews; but as they could not then satisfy him as to the validity of their claim, he deferred this matter also till his return. On his way to Egypt, Alexander was detained two months before Gaza; which being a strong city, and ably defended by Betis, who governed there for Darius, sustained the attacks of all his forces during that time. Here the king received two dangerous wounds, which, added to the delay, enraged him to such a degree, that when he had taken the city, he treated the inhabitants and their valiant governor with excessive cruelty: acting over again, or even surpassing the tragic scenes he had displayed at Thebes and at Tyre. When he arrived at Pelusium in Egypt, so far from meeting with any resistance, he was welcomed by the natives as a deliverer; and hailed as their king. The Persians from the time of Cambyzes had always been hateful to the Egyptians, by the tyranny they exercised towards them; and by the contempt they evinced for their superstitions, which, absurd as they were, were nevertheless held sacred by the nation. It is not surprising, therefore, that they should welcome any new comer, nor that Alexander at the head of a victorious army should find them ready to open their gates to him. It was when he was fully established in the possession of Egypt that Alexander projected that silly journey

to the temple of Jupiter Hammon in Libya. Intoxicated with success, he seems to have forgotten what had passed at Jerusalem; and far from considering himself an instrument to execute the decrees of the God of heaven, he becomes inflated with the contemptible vanity of passing for a divinity himself. On his way to this temple, he fixed on the site of a new city which he judged commodious for trade and commerce; and to which he gave his own name. Having settled every thing respecting this city, the building went on so rapidly during his absence, that on his return he provided for the peopling of it, by drawing colonies from other nations. Among these were many Jews, to whom he allowed not only the free exercise of their religion and laws, but the same immunities as were granted to his own Macedonians, whom he settled there. Alexander having wintered at Memphis, and there regulated the future government of Egypt, returned into Asia in the spring to prosecute the war against Darius. When he reached Palestine, he was informed that Andromachus, whom he had left to govern that country and Syria, had been tumultuously killed by the Samaritans. The disappointment of these people when they applied to Alexander, and were refused the favours which had been conferred on the Jews, is supposed to have caused the discontent and rage which incited them to this murder. Alexander was greatly displeased, and it was not long before he avenged it. He put to death the principal aggressors; and driving the rest of the inhabitants out of Samaria, settled a colony of Macedonians there; and gave their other territories to the Jews. The remnant of the Samaritans who survived this calamity, re-

tired to Shechem,* near Mount Gerizim, which place afterwards became the chief city of that people. The eight thousand who had followed Alexander, were sent by him to settle at Thebais in Egypt: lest revenge for the fate of their countrymen should incite them to mutiny. Alexander having settled the affairs of Syria and Palestine, again took the field, and crossing the rivers Euphrates and Tigris, gained the decisive battle of Arbela, by which he put an end to the Persian empire: for Darius was unable to make head against him any more; and the death of that prince shortly after, left him without a rival.

Thus, in the space of three years, was this mighty empire subdued; because the time appointed for its end was come: and thus were the ambitious views of Alexander rendered subservient to the designs of God's Providence. In our reflections on the rise and fall of empires and kingdoms, let us ever remember that, "promotion cometh neither from the east nor from the west;" that it is not the strength of armies, nor the policy of rulers that can in any way decide the fate of nations. But that "God is the judge who setteth up one and putteth down another." Let us be no less mindful that the strength of any people is the defence of the Most High; and that where the fear of God prevails, the fear of man is not only taken away, but the power of man annihilated: "For if God be for us, who can be against us?" In the dreadful scenes of carnage and destruction which attend the progress of a conqueror, and in the crimes and cruelties which disgrace the annals of mankind, let us contemplate the consequences which sin has entailed on our race: ever remembering

* Or Sycbar.

that our hearts are, by nature, equally corrupt with those of the most profligate; and if we have not, like them, been left in ignorance of God's will, to give ourselves up to the dominion of sin, let us ascribe glory and praise to the Lord for his redeeming grace, whereby he has called us out of such darkness into his marvellous light. There are no other circumstances in the life of Alexander which regard our present subject, excepting his desire to restore and beautify Babylon; where he intended to fix the seat of his empire. He began by endeavouring to repair the bank, which had been broken down by Cyrus; but some obstacle retarded the progress of this work, and his death soon after put him entire end to it. He was no less solicitous to rebuild the temple of Belus, which had been destroyed by Xerxes; and for this purpose employed his soldiers to tear away the rubbish. When it came to the turn of those among them who were Jews, they absolutely refused to labour at this work: alleging that their religion forbade them to assist in the erection of an idol temple. Alexander ordered them to be punished; but this measure had no effect in bringing them to obedience in this particular. The king was at length so much pleased with their constancy, that he not only forgave their refusal, but dispensed with their services, and allowed them to return to their own country. It is scarcely needful to remind you that God had declared by the prophet Jeremiah that Babylon should sink and never rise again. The attempts of Alexander were not followed up by any of his successors, so that the city was left in the forlorn and unhealthy state to which the stagnant waters had reduced it. On the building of Seleucia, about thirty years after, the inhabitants quit-

ted a spot which was no less unwholesome than unfavourable to traffic, and went to dwell in the new city! Babylon, thus deserted, fell into utter contempt and ruin, and became "a place for the bittern, and pools of water; a dwelling place for owls and beasts of the desert; till at length it was swept away with the besoff of destruction," so completely, that travellers in Asia have had great difficulty in ascertaining the spot where it stood."

LETTER XXVI.

BEFORE we quit the subjects which have lately engaged our notice, I must beg your attention to the remarks I wish to offer on the character of Alexander. He has been surnamed "The Great" by his biographers, but the actions of his life, whether public or private, are by no means such as can give him any claim to that title. If indeed a man's character were to be estimated by his success, the case would be altered: but even then, Alexander would stand pre-eminent among those only who have been the scourges of mankind; and that would not surely be an enviable distinction. There is a fascinating charm called glory which historians too frequently throw around conquerors; and which, dazzling the eyes of superficial beholders, prevents a close inspection of their real character. Young persons are very apt to yield to the impressions made in this manner; because their inexperience leads them to rely implicitly on the judgment of others; and their unsta-

* Isaiah xiii. 19—22. xiv. 23. Jeremiah l. li.

acting openness induces them to believe every thing
sively, which in any way appears so. It is thus I must
ccount for the predilection entertained for the heroes
f ancient times, whom I formerly admired, perhaps as
nthusiastically as you do now. The virtues of Alex-
ander have been greatly extolled, let us proceed to
analyse them: beginning with those which should be
possessed by a military commander. You, who delight
in reading warlike achievements, are doubtless aware
that these are, valour, prudence, fortitude, self-posses-
sion, temperance, clemency, and a desire for peace as
soon as it can be honourably obtained. Now view the
conduct of Alexander, and you will perceive that it
displays none of these qualities, in that just measure
which allows them to blend, and form a distinguished
character. Of courage, indeed, he had a large share ;
but that, for want of being tempered by prudence and
self-possession, degenerated into rashness and brutal
ferocity. Of clemency he had none ; as the fate of
Thebes, Tyre, and Gaza, sufficiently attest : and so far
was he from desiring peace, that he constantly refused
it to Darius ; and thought no regions too remote, no
people too inconsiderable or poor, to be the subjects of
his unreasonable warfare. Temperance certainly did
not belong to his character. His bacchanalian proces-
sion, the burning of Persepolis, and his premature death ;
prove this unquestionably. His want of self-possession
caused him to be the murderer of his dearest friend ;
and the total absence of fortitude appeared on many
occasions ; but more especially when his wounds, and
the delay he met with at Gaza, caused him to sacrifice
the valiant governor of that place to his ungenerous
rage. As a king, he is no more to be admired than as

a general. The subjects he left behind were exposed to the rapacity of his ministers; and those who followed him were subjected to the toils of war during many years, for the mere gratification of his immeasurable ambition. As a man, he gave way to every impulse of passion, pride, and vanity: rarely, if ever, submitting to the dictates of reason. What folly can surpass that which he displayed in wishing to be thought a divinity; and what littleness can exceed that which induced him to bribe the priests of Jupiter Hammon to declare that he was one? His silly imitation of the heroes of Homer, led him not only into ridiculous inconsistencies, but into the commission of the most flagrant acts of cruelty. If it was needful for him to be a copyist, he had no occasion to consult the pages of fiction; since the authentic annals of Greece presented a list of heroes worthy of imitation. The justice of Aristides, the forbearance of Themistocles, the prudence of Miltiades, the fortitude of Leonidas, and the pacific moderation of Cimon were all combined with steady undaunted valour; and had they been cultivated by Alexander, they would have rendered him an accomplished general, a patriotic king, and a virtuous man. I trust these remarks will help you to form a different opinion of conquerors to that which is generally entertained; and that you will perceive they are to be regarded as instruments in the hand of God, for the chastisement of the nations they are permitted to overcome. The Lord himself calls one of them "the rod of his anger;"* and declares to another that, "The Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the basest of men,"† whenever the crying

* Isaiah x. 5.

† Daniel iv. 17.

iniquity of a nation requires a display of his righteous judgments. As an instrument of this kind, Alexander was foreshown by prophecy; and at the appointed time raised up and sustained by Divine Providence, till he had performed the purposes of his elevation. When these were fulfilled, he was permitted to fall, as a rod or scourge from the hand of one, who, after inflicting a needful chastisement, has no farther use for it.

The sudden death of Alexander, and the division of his empire into four parts, were no less the subjects of prophecy than his astonishing and impetuous career: for "when the he-goat had waxed very great, and was become strong, the great horn was broken; and for it came up four notable ones toward the four winds of heaven."* These four kingdoms as the angel declared were "not in his power;"† nor were they in his family; for though his captains pretended to set up his brother and his sons, they took especial care that none of them should survive longer than was convenient to their ambitious views; and of all the relations of Alexander, not one was permitted to live more than a few years after his death.

Jaddua, the high priest of the Jews, died in the third year of the nominal king Philip Aridæus; after having held his office twenty years. He was succeeded by his son Onias. After the death of Alexander, Syria, Phœnicia, and Judea were assigned to one of his captains, named Laomedon, who kept the undisturbed possession of them during three years; but was vanquished and driven out of them in the fourth year by Ptolemy, who considered these countries desirable because they were contiguous to Egypt. The Jews, however, who regarded

* Daniel viii. 8.

† Daniel viii. 22.

their oath to Laomedon, did not readily yield to Ptolemy; but chose rather to sustain a siege than violate their allegiance: Jerusalem being well fortified by situation as well as by art, might have held out a considerable time; but Ptolemy having discovered that the walls were left unguarded on the sabbath, made an assault on that day, and took the place without resistance. This superstitious observance of the sabbath affords a sort of presumptive evidence that the Jews had, even at this time, a corrupt notion respecting some of their laws. For had they referred to the sense of Scripture on this occasion rather than to the letter, they would have acted otherwise. Joshua was commanded to compass the city of Jericho seven successive days, one of which (though perhaps not the last) must have been the sabbath: and though this might not authorize the people of God to *attack* their enemies on that holy day, it would surely afford a precedent for their defending themselves when assaulted: as they might have known that the Gracious God, who gave them the sabbath, did not intend that their lives should be sacrificed in the observance of it. When Ptolemy had thus taken the city, he treated the Jews with great rigour; and carried away no less than a hundred thousand of them as captives into Egypt. But on mature reflection, he changed his conduct towards them: for rightly considering that their opposition to him arose from their faithful adherence to Laomedon, he sought by kindness to attach them in a similar manner to himself. He appointed them to places of trust, employed them to garrison cities, important by their strength and situation, and allowed such as were not thus appointed to dwell in the same places; because they requested permission to do so. It was at this time

hat the Jews were settled in Lybia and Cyrene, which Ptolemy had recently subdued. Their descendants continued in those countries till the Christian era, and are mentioned in the New Testament.* In the midst of the contentions among Alexander's successors, Judea fell next into the hands of Antigonus. On this occasion Ptolemy was obliged to retreat into Egypt, where many Jews followed him voluntarily: preferring his mild government to that of Antigonus; and a quiet residence in Egypt to the disturbed state of Syria and Palestine, which were so frequently the seat of war, till after the battle of Ipsus, when these countries were assigned to Ptolemy.

Onias the high priest dying after he had officiated twenty-one years, had for his successor Simon, who on account of the piety and holiness of his life, was surnamed "the Just." It was during his priesthood that Seleucus built Antioch on the Orontes, and Seleucia on the Tigris, with many other cities of inferior note in Asia. To promote the peopling of these cities he granted immunities and privileges to all who would reside in them. These, with the mildness of his government, induced numbers to place themselves under his protection: so that his new cities soon became populous and flourishing. The Jews were especially favoured by Seleucus, who allowed them the same privileges as the Macedonians; and they dwelt in large numbers, in all parts of his territories: those of Babylonia, inhabiting the cities east of the Euphrates, and those of Palestine settling in the cities of Syria, where they became as considerable as their countrymen in Alexandria.

* Acts ii. 10. vi. 9.

LETTER XXVII.

SIMON the Just held the sacred office of high priest only nine years; but the sanctity of his character, and the good he effected during that time gained him the veneration and love of the Jews, who have always had a singular regard for his memory. He is said to have been the last of the great synagogue, or succession of elders, who, to the number of a hundred and twenty, flourished after the return of the Jews from Babylon; and who laboured to build up the church and state, by collecting, arranging, teaching, and enforcing the holy scriptures. Ezra, as we have seen, had a principal share in collecting the sacred writings; but as the later records of Nehemiah, and the prophecies of Malachi were written after his time, they must have been added to the canon by some other person. Besides there are circumstances* which prove that the whole was not absolutely completed till after the time of Alexander; and as Simon the Just was the last person employed in settling the canon; the perfecting of it, in the particulars referred to, may properly be ascribed to him.

Simon, at his death, had not a son old enough to succeed him; his brother Eleazar was therefore raised to the high priesthood. Simon had also been president of the sanhedrim, or great council of the Jews, and in this office he was succeeded by Antigonus of Socho, who is considered to have been the first of the Mishnaical doctors, or of those scribes that favoured traditions. The sanhedrim or great council of Jerusalem consisted of seventy persons, chosen from among the scribes or

* See the Genealogy of Jeconiah, 1 Chron. iii. 17. Also that of Jeshua, Nehemiah xii. 10, 11.

doctors of the law. They were the judges for the whole nation, in all matters, civil or religious; and in conjunction with the high priest, executed the laws. There was also a sanhedrim in every city of Judea, consisting of twenty three persons only, who were chosen in like manner. Nicodemus, who came to our Lord by night, was a member of the great sanhedrim. Joseph of Arimathea, who assisted in his burial, was one of the minor sanhedrims held in that city. The terms scribes, lawyers, rulers, counsellors, and elders, are applied in the New Testament to denote the persons of whom these councils were composed.

Ptolemy Soter having ruled in Egypt thirty-nine years from the death of Alexander, and twenty-four from the time he assumed the regal power, was now more than eighty years of age. By the persuasion of his queen Berenice, he determined on leaving the kingdom to her son, though he was not entitled to it as the eldest of his children. To prevent the contentions this choice was likely to occasion, he raised him to the throne during his life, to the great displeasure of his elder brother, who immediately fled from the Egyptian court. The favoured prince is known in history by the name of Ptolemy Philadelphus; and you are probably acquainted with him as the founder of the celebrated Alexandrian library and museum. In the first year of his reign, the famous watch-tower or light-house on the island of Pharos was finished. I presume it is scarcely needful to add that this tower was accounted one of the seven wonders of the world; and that from it all other light-houses have received the name Pharos. But a work of more lasting utility, and of greater importance than either of the above, distinguished the reign of this prince. I mean the translation of the

Hebrew scriptures of the Old Testament into Greek. It has been said that this work was undertaken at the desire of Ptolemy himself, who hearing that the Jews had a celebrated book, sent for a copy of it; and employed seventy elders of the Jewish nation to translate it. This account, gaining credence, obtained for the Greek version the name of Septuagint, which it still retains; but judicious writers reject the relation as fictitious, and ascribe the undertaking to the Alexandrian Jews, who from being long accustomed to the Greek language, had forgotten the Chaldee; as their ancestors had formerly forgotten the Hebrew. Whatever was the origin of this translation, the effect was certainly beneficial; for Greek being at that time the universal language, the scriptures became accessible to any who would read them. Nor was this all: for as the Jews by their great regard for traditions greatly corrupted themselves, and made the word of God of none effect; so it may be inferred that they would also have altered the scriptures themselves had not this translation, and the consequent number of copies dispersed abroad, prevented their doing so.

After the coming of our Lord also, when his gospel began to be preached in all the world, there was no occasion for studying the prophecies of the Old Testament in the original Hebrew; because the Septuagint version was ready made, and within the reach of all who could read Greek; and its authenticity was fully established by the frequent quotations made from it by our Lord and his apostles.

Elezar the high priest died soon after the time in which this translation of the Old Testament is said to have been made; he was succeeded by Manasseh his uncle, who was brother to Jaddua; for his nephew

Onias was not yet old enough to be invested with his hereditary dignity. There is nothing remarkable on record during the priesthood of Manasseh; though it embraces a period of twenty six years: at his death Onias, the second of that name, succeeded him. The character of Onias did not resemble that of his father: for he was so far from promoting the welfare of his nation by his pious zeal, that he was on the point of incurring its ruin by his avarice, as we shall see in the course of our history. In the beginning of his priesthood a remarkable transaction took place between Ptolemy Philadelphus and Antiochus Theos king of Syria, who having been some time at war with each other, made peace on condition that Antiochus should divorce his queen, and marry Berenice the daughter of Ptolemy; making her children, if she had any, his successors, instead of those by his former marriage. In compliance with his part of the treaty Ptolemy embarked at Pelusium with his daughter, and sailing into Syria, went up the Orontes to Seleucia, where he delivered her to Antiochus, who married her with great pomp and solemnity.

Now open your bible, and you will see a circumstantial prediction of this compact, by the prophet Daniel,* who foretold the final issue of it also. Ptolemy dying the year after this marriage, Antiochus did not care to observe the conditions made with him any longer; he therefore put away Berenice, and reinstated Laodice his former queen. The latter however did not think herself secure while Antiochus had the power of recalling her rival; therefore to prevent such a change she contrived to have him poisoned; and then carefully concealed his death till she had firmly established her son Seleucus

* Daniel xi. 6.

Hebrew scriptures of the Old Testament were Greek. It has been said that this work was undertaken at the instigation of Ptolemy monarch, who hearing that the Jews had a celebrated book, sent for a copy of it; and that several elders of the Jewish nation so desirous to be acquainted with the Greek language, obtained for the Greek version the name of Septuagint, which it still retains: but judicious writers reject the relation as fictitious, and ascribe the undertaking to the Alexandrian Jews, from being long accustomed to the Greek language, had forgotten the Chaldee; as their ancestors had formerly forgotten the Hebrew. Whatever was the origin of the translation, the effect was certainly beneficial: the Greek being at that time the universal language, the scriptures became accessible to any who would read them. Nor was this all: for as the Jews by their regard for traditions greatly corrupted themselves, it made the word of God of none effect; so it may be inferred that they would also have altered the scriptures themselves had not this translation, and the consequent number of copies dispersed abroad, prevented their doing so.

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* Daniel xi. 6.

on the throne. Berenice being informed that her death also was meditated, fled with her infant son to an asylum at Daphne: but she was treacherously given up to Laodice, who put her to death, with her child and all her attendants who had come with her from Egypt. Thus were the predictions concerning her literally fulfilled: neither she nor her husband retained their power; for both were put to death. She was given up "and they that brought her" after she had lost the protection of her father, who had "strengthened her."

The brother of Berenice, who had succeeded his father, hearing of his sister's danger, hastened to her relief; but he came too late to save her life. Some of the cities of Asia Minor had also collected a force on her behalf; and were marching towards Antiöch. Ptolemy united his army with theirs, and determined to avenge the death of his sister. He quickly subdued Syria and Cilicia, put Laodice to death, and, crossing the Euphrates, pursued his conquests even to Babylon; but a revolt in Egypt obliging him to return thither, he left two of his generals to retain the provinces he had taken; and returned home loaded with the treasures of the east. Among the spoils were many of the Egyptian idols, which Cambyzes had carried away into Persia. These were restored to their several temples by Ptolemy on his return; and the recovering of them gave such delight to their deluded worshipers that the title of *Euergetes* (benefactor) was thenceforth conferred on him for bringing them back. I have entered minutely into these particulars, that you may see how minutely they were foretold: "One standing up in the estate" of Ptolemy Philadelphus, that was his successor, the brother of Berenice, did prevail against "the king of the north;"

and *did* "carry away captives into Egypt their gods with their princes, and with their precious vessels of silver and of gold;" and the same Ptolemy Evergetes *did* "continue more years than the king of the north:" for he lived four years after the death of Seleucus Callinicus.

To the faithful servants of God, who made his word their study, and his strength their confidence, the literal accomplishment of these predictions must have proved a source of comfort and encouragement, amidst the commotions which disturbed all parts of the known world at this time. They must have seen that, "The Lord is king, be the people never so impatient;" and have felt assured that, "He reigneth in the midst of the heathen, be the earth never so unquiet."

LETTER XXIX.

ON his return from his expedition into Syria, Ptolemy visited Jerusalem, and offered sacrifices there to the God of Israel, in acknowledgment of the victories he had obtained. From this circumstance it is inferred that the predictions of his success were shown to him; and that he was thereby induced to ascribe it to the Lord, whose prophet had so clearly and circumstantially foretold it. We may easily suppose that Ptolemy, being thus rendered favourable to the Jews, would be disposed to continue to them all the privileges they had hitherto enjoyed under his predecessors: and as there is no particular occurrence on record during twenty years, we may conclude that they enjoyed peace and safety under

his government. In the twenty-first year of his reign, however, they had nearly forfeited his favour and protection, through the avarice of Onias, who had neglected the payment of the annual tribute during several years. Ptolemy, much displeased at this omission, sent Athenion an officer of his court to Jerusalem, to demand immediate payment of all that was due to him ; and to threaten the Jews that he would dispossess them of their country, if they did not comply with his demand. The arrival of Athenion caused a general consternation in Jerusalem, no one knowing what ought to be done : for Onias, who had brought this distress upon the people, had neither talent nor activity to extricate them from it : besides which he was too old and infirm to be of use in such an emergency. In this dilemma one of his sisters sent for her son named Joseph, who was absent at his country house ; telling him what had happened, and requiring his immediate presence in Jerusalem. This young man was much beloved and respected by his countrymen for his prudence, and the consistent piety of his character ; and he was made the happy instrument of their deliverance from the impending danger. On his arrival he reproached his uncle for the distress to which he had reduced the nation ; and told him that he could not do less than go in person and explain the affair to the king. Onias, however, declaring that he would rather resign his office than undertake such a journey, Joseph offered to go in his stead ; and having obtained his consent, he proposed this measure to the people for their concurrence also : desiring them to repress their fears, as he had no doubt of being able to appease the king's displeasure. The people thanked him for thus undertaking their cause ; and rejoiced in the hope of that success which

he anticipated, and which his piety and prudence taught them to expect. When Joseph had thus tranquillized the public mind, he went to seek Athenion, and invited him to reside in his house during his stay at Jerusalem. Having secured him for his guest, he succeeded in obtaining his good opinion by a display of munificent hospitality and kindness: and when Athenion was about to depart he presented him with many gifts of great value; by which means he secured a fair representation to the king; and a favourable reception for himself at the Egyptian court, whither he promised to follow Athenion shortly; in order to afford the king full satisfaction respecting the tribute. Athenion was so well pleased with Joseph, that on his return to Alexandria he spoke of him in such terms, as made the king desirous of seeing him; and greatly prepossessed him in his favour. Joseph did not long delay his embassy; but set out as soon as the needful preparations were made. On his way he fell in with a company of nobles from Syria and Phœnicia; who were going into Egypt to make terms with Ptolemy for the farming of his revenues in those provinces. As they all travelled with splendid equipages to impress the Egyptians with a notion of their greatness, the more quiet retinue of Joseph became the subject of their raillery. He however continued with them during the rest of their journey; and by attending to their conversation, gained some very useful knowledge, of which he afterwards availed himself very profitably. When Joseph arrived at Alexandria the king was absent; but learning that he was at Memphis, he did not await his return, but followed him thither. On his way he met the king, who, with the queen and Athenion, was travelling towards Alexandria. Joseph was no sooner

perceived by Athenion than he pointed him out to the king, as the person of whom he had spoken so favourably. Ptolemy immediately desired him to come up into his chariot, and there entered into conversation with him on the subject of his embassy. Joseph pleaded his uncle's cause so well, urging his advanced age and incapacity as an excuse for his neglect, that Ptolemy was no less satisfied with the apology, than with the advocate who made it; for among other marks of his favour he ordered him to reside in his palace at Alexandria, and assigned him a place at his own table. Joseph had it in his power to requite the king's kindness shortly after; for when the day arrived on which the revenues were to be disposed of to the highest bidder, and the nobles who had travelled with him offered only eight thousand talents for the whole, he openly reprov'd them, for under-rating their value; and offered more than double that sum, to farm them on his own account. The information Joseph had gained from these nobles on the journey enabled him to make this offer, with which the king was very well pleased; but as it was so large an increase Ptolemy demanded what security he would give for the fulfilment of his engagement. Joseph replied that his securities were unexceptionable; and being desired to name them, he fixed on the king and the queen to be bound to each other for the performance of his agreement. The king laughed at this facetious appointment, and granted him the charge he desired without farther hesitation. Joseph's next care was to borrow five hundred talents at Alexandria, in order to pay the arrears of tribute for his uncle; and when this was done, he requested a guard of two thousand soldiers from the king, that he might be properly assisted in the

execution of his new office. With this retinue he shortly after quitted Egypt and returned towards Judea. On his way he stopped at Askelon to demand the king's tribute, which being insolently refused, he made an example of the principal offenders; causing their estates to be confiscated, and sending the amount of the forfeitures to Ptolemy. He was obliged to pursue the same measures at Scythopolis, another city in Palestine; but these two examples sufficed to confirm his power, and to render all other cities submissive: so that he afterwards collected the tribute without any opposition. When he sent in his accounts to the king, they were so satisfactory, that he was continued in his office not only during the rest of his reign, but during those of succeeding princes, till the provinces he farmed fell into the hands of Antiochus the Great, twenty-two years after. Ptolemy Evergetes died after having reigned twenty-five years: he was succeeded by his son Ptolemy Philopator, who did not resemble his father, nor any of his predecessors in character; for he was vicious, profligate, and tyrannical. Antiochus king of Syria, thinking the accession of such a prince afforded him a good opportunity for regaining the provinces Evergetes had taken from Seleucus, made war upon him for this purpose. The contest lasted till the fifth year of Philopator, when the two kings met at Raphia, and a battle ensued in which Ptolemy was victorious. This victory was decisive; as it obliged Antiochus to yield the disputed territories to the king of Egypt. The Jews suffered greatly during this war; for the supineness of Onias, added to his age, rendered his administration very defective: so that no measures were taken for the welfare and security of the people. Their

old enemies, the Samaritans, being aware of this, seized every opportunity of making incursions into Judea; where they plundered the country, and carried away many of the people, to sell them for slaves. Nor was it to any purpose that the Jews complained of them, as there were always two adverse parties, with one of which they could take refuge, when accused to the other. This was not all the nation had to suffer; for as is always the case when a contested territory becomes the seat of war, each party occasionally got possession of Judea, and the country at such times suffered no less from the encroachments of friends than from the invasion of enemies. The retreat of Antiochus therefore caused great rejoicing in Cælo-Syria and Palestine; and the cities emulated each other in their eagerness to yield to Ptolemy; for they had now been long under the government of Egypt, which, during the preceding reigns, they had found to be mild and tolerant. Among the numerous ambassadors who waited on Ptolemy at this time to make submission for their respective cities, were those of the Jews, who with the rest were kindly received by him. When these provinces were thus reinstated in his possession, he resolved to make a progress through them, and to visit their principal cities. On his arrival at Jerusalem, he viewed the temple from without, and offered many sacrifices to the God of Israel; probably because he was informed that his father as well as Alexander the Great had done so, when they came thither. He also presented many valuable gifts to the temple; and had he stopped at this point, would have afforded the Jews great satisfaction by his veneration for it. But he was seized with an ardent curiosity to view the inside of the

building; and notwithstanding the remonstrances of the priests, and the entreaties of the people, he passed into the inner court, and would have entered the sanctuary, had he not been miraculously prevented. The people and priests not daring to use absolute force against the king, called upon the Lord to vindicate his own honour, and not to suffer such a profanation of his holy temple. Their prayers were heard, and immediately answered; for Ptolemy was struck with such terror and confusion of mind that he became senseless, and was carried out of the place with the utmost haste by his attendants. When he recovered, he was filled with fierce displeasure against the Jews, and immediately left Jerusalem; threatening them with his vengeance for what had happened to him.

The high priest who withstood the attempt of Ptolemy was Simon the second, son of Onias, who had died the preceding year, the thirty-third of his priesthood. Antiochus, after the battle of Raphia, desiring to make peace with Ptolemy, offered him very advantageous terms, which the latter having agreed to, returned to Alexandria. It was then that his rage against the Jews broke forth into acts of cruelty and oppression; and that they might not in any case have the power of appealing to him, he made a decree that none should enter into his palace, who did not worship his gods. I have before told you that when Alexander planted the Jews in his new city, he placed them on a level with his Macedonians, and thus made them citizens of the first rank. All their privileges were confirmed by Ptolemy Soter and his successors; but Philopator now determined to degrade them to the third or lowest rank in Egypt; and for this purpose ordered them to come and

be enrolled anew. At the time of their enrolment they were to be marked with a hot iron, in the form of an ivy leaf, which was the badge of his god Bacchus. All who refused to be thus enrolled and marked, were to be sold for slaves; and all who withstood these orders, were to be put to death. At the same time he allowed such as would forsake their religion, and worship his gods, to retain their rank and privileges as before: but for the honour of the Jewish nation at that time, though many thousands of them dwelt at Alexandria, only three hundred were so base as to accept this disgraceful offer. These apostates were held in such detestation by their countrymen that they entirely excluded them from all future intercourse, and treated them with the contempt they merited. The king, imputing this conduct to opposition against him, was so enraged by it that he resolved on the destruction of the whole nation; intending to begin with the Jews of Alexandria and other parts of Egypt, and then to proceed against those of Judea. In pursuance of this plan he issued orders for all the Jews in Egypt to be brought to Alexandria in chains; and on their arrival caused them to be shut up in the Hippodrome, a place without the city, where horse racing and other spectacles were exhibited, with the design of having them destroyed by elephants, for the savage amusement of the multitude. On the day appointed, the people assembled, and the elephants were brought forth; but as the king did not make his appearance, the spectacle was delayed till the following day. Ptolemy had rioted in intemperance during the preceding night, which caused him to sleep later than usual: and as he was much addicted to the vice of drunkenness, the same cause detained him on

the following day also, till the hour for the exhibition was past. All this time his intended victims were engaged in prayer to Almighty God, for their deliverance; and He who has said, "call upon me in the day of trouble and I will deliver thee," granted them a proof of his faithfulness on this occasion. For on the third morning, when the elephants, having been previously intoxicated with wine and frankincense, were let loose upon the Jews, instead of attacking them, they turned furiously upon the assembled spectators, and destroyed great numbers of them. Besides this there were some extraordinary appearances in the air, which manifested so fully the interposition of Divine Power in behalf of the Jews, that Ptolemy and his people were much terrified. The king especially, apprehensive of immediate destruction, ordered all the Jews to be set at liberty; and revoking all his decrees against them, restored not only their former privileges, but added other favours and immunities to them. Among the latter, was one which empowered them to put to death all who had apostatized; and as the law of God condemned all such, they were put to death accordingly.

LETTER XXIX.

PTOLEMY PHILOPATOR was only twenty years of age at his accession; but a life of luxury and intemperance brought him to a premature end, when he had reigned only seventeen years. He was succeeded by his son Ptolemy Epiphanes, a child of five years old, who narrowly escaped falling a victim to the ambition of An-

Antiochus king of Syria, and Philip king of Macedon, who had formed a league to seize his dominions, and divide them between them. The Egyptians applied to the Romans on this occasion ; begging them to assume the guardianship of their infant king ; and to interpose their authority for the protection of his kingdom. In the meantime Antiochus had begun his operations, according to the plan agreed on between him and Philip ; and had made himself master of Cœlo-Syria and Palestine, when the Romans, in compliance with the request made to them, sent ambassadors to inform him that he must desist from making war on the young king of Egypt, who was now placed under their protection. A similar embassy was sent by them to Philip of Macedon ; and a third was dispatched into Egypt to receive the young king into the protection of the Roman people, and to settle the internal affairs of his kingdom. Aristomenes, who was appointed to be the king's guardian and prime minister, lost no time in raising an army to recover Cœlo-Syria and Palestine from Antiochus. He gave the command of it to Scopas, an Etolian, who profiting by the absence of the Syrian king, gained possession of all Judea ; and having placed a garrison in Jerusalem, returned to winter at Alexandria. Though Scopas was thus successful, it quickly appeared that he was not able to cope with Antiochus. For on the return of that prince, in the following spring, he was totally defeated by him ; and the contested provinces were once more brought under the dominion of Syria. The Jews were at this time very much alienated from the Egyptian government ; probably on account of the persecution they had suffered under Philopator, and the more recent exactions and ravages of Scopas, who was a very covetous man. On the approach of Antiochus, therefore, they

gladly surrendered all their cities to him ; and when he reached Jerusalem the priests and elders went out in solemn procession to meet and welcome him. They provided for his army all that was needful ; and lent their assistance for the reduction of the garrison left in the castle by Scopas. This conduct was so pleasing to Antiochus, that he issued a decree in their favour, which was addressed to Ptolemy one of his lieutenants, granting them many privileges. And he afterwards published another decree, in which he particularly ordained that no stranger should enter within the sept of the temple. This clause seems to have been in reference to the sacrilegious attempt of Philopator, which had doubtless made a lasting impression on the people of Jerusalem ; and contributed to render them favourable to the cause of Antiochus. But there were other causes also which co-operated in producing this change in their sentiments. Antiochus had found the Jews of Babylonia very faithful and steady in their attachment to him ; and very serviceable on many occasions. He had therefore conferred many favours on them, and displayed marks of his confidence in them. On one occasion especially, when some commotions happened in Phrygia and Lydia, he ordered two thousand Jewish families to be sent into those countries, and placed in the strongest fortresses there, as guards to preserve the peace and good order of their neighbourhood. He paid all expenses attending this removal, and assigned them not only lands and possessions, but a plentiful subsistence till they should gather in the fruits of their several allotments. Antiochus having gained Coelo-Syria and Palestine, was anxious to retain possession of them without any farther interruption from the Egyptians ; he therefore sent an ambassador to Alexandria with proposals of marriage

between his daughter Cleopatra and Ptolemy Epiphanes, when they should be old enough ; and promised to bestow the conquered provinces on the princess, when the nuptials were celebrated. These terms were acceded to by the Egyptian court ; and Antiochus was left to pursue his ambitious schemes in other quarters. The Jews being thus freed from the harassing warfare to which they had been long subjected by the contending princes, continued to enjoy, during several years, the privileges Antiochus had granted them. They had also the comforts of a well ordered administration at this time ; for though we have no absolute testimony to the character of Simon, the high priest, there is reason to infer that he was a good man ; and Onias the third, his son and successor, was a person of distinguished piety and worth.

I shall not pursue the career of Antiochus the Great, who, as you doubtless know, withstood the Romans several years ; and was at last vanquished by them at Magnesia. His death was more inglorious than the latter part of his life ; for he is said to have been killed by the inhabitants of Elymais, for having plundered their temple dedicated to Jupiter. The prophet Daniel, in the chapter already cited,* sets forth a distinct prediction of the events we have lately noticed. It is therefore my design to take a retrospective view of them now in their prophetic order, and exact accomplishment. The tenth verse points out Antiochus, who made war on Ptolemy Philopator, to recover the provinces taken from his father Seleucus, by Ptolemy Evergetes, when he avenged the death of his sister. In the eleventh and twelfth verses, we see the king of the South (Ptolemy Philopator) coming with a large

* Daniel xi.

army to oppose the "great multitude" which was really "given into his hand," at the battle of Raphia. Ptolemy's heart was indeed lifted up when he had thus "cast down many ten thousands;" but he was not "strengthened by it:" for his vicious and cruel conduct, added to his luxury and sloth, alienated not only the dependent states, but his own immediate subjects, and drove them into rebellion against him. The four succeeding verses depict the second invasion of Antiochus; "after certain years, with a great army and with much riches;" his league with Philip of Macedon, "against the king of the south;" his taking of the "fenced cities," without opposition from Egypt, in whom there was no "strength to withstand;" his standing "in the glorious land," which, by the continual warfare he kept up, was, in a manner, "consumed by his hand:" for he found it needful to grant a decree for rebuilding the city of Jerusalem, and restoring it from the ruinous state to which it was reduced. In the seventeenth verse, are foreshown the alliance which Antiochus made with Egypt by giving his daughter to Ptolemy, with intent to gain the ascendant over him, by her means; and his failure in this respect: for she did not "stand on his side," but on the side of her husband. Neither was she "for him," but declared publicly against him, by joining in the congratulation sent to the Romans after they had defeated him. The eighteenth and nineteenth verses describe the expedition of Antiochus into the *Ægean* Sea, where he took many of the isles; his defeat by Lucius Scipio; his return to Antioch, "the fort of his own land;" and his obscure and inglorious end, when he *stumbled and fell, and was no more found.*

LETTER XXX.

IN the same year that Antiochus died, his daughter Cleopatra, queen of Egypt, gave birth to a son, who afterwards reigned in that country by the name of Ptolemy Philometor. On this joyful occasion all the nobility of the provinces hastened to Alexandria to present their congratulations and the customary gifts. Joseph, who since the restoration of Cælo-Syria and Palestine to Egypt, had been reinstated in his office of collector, was now too old to undertake so long a journey; he therefore sent his youngest son Hyrcanus to present his congratulations at the Egyptian court. Hyrcanus prevailed on his father not to send presents from Judea, but to give him an order on his agents at Alexandria for money to purchase such as he should think most suitable. Joseph gave him an unlimited order; not supposing that he would exceed ten talents in this way. But Hyrcanus demanded a thousand talents, and by means of magnificent presents, so ingratiated himself with the king and queen, that he obtained the appointment of collector of the king's revenues in the country beyond Jordan. His father was extremely displeased with him for this unworthy behaviour; and his brothers were so angry, that they conspired to way-lay and kill him, on his return. But Hyrcanus being escorted by a guard of soldiers, put the assailants to flight after two of his brothers were killed. When he arrived at Jerusalem, he was treated with deserved contempt, as an undutiful son, and an unworthy member of society; and he soon left that city to enter upon the

office for which he had sacrificed all that can afford real satisfaction, or permanent enjoyment.

Joseph died not long after this; and then Hyrcanus and his surviving brothers carried on a war respecting their father's estate, which greatly disturbed the peace of Jerusalem. The high priest and most of the people were opposed to Hyrcanus, who was obliged to retreat beyond Jordan; where after some years he ended a turbulent life by suicide.

Ptolemy Epiphanes when he had reigned twenty-four years, from the death of his father, was poisoned at the instigation of some of his nobles. He was about to undertake a war against Seleucus Philopator, the successor of Antiochus the Great; when some of his courtiers inquiring where he would find money to carry it on, he replied that his friends were his money. This answer alarming his rich nobles, they conspired to put an end to his plans and his life together. His son and successor Ptolemy Philometor, being only six years of age, was placed under the guardianship of Cleopatra his mother, who governed the kingdom in his name.

The provinces of Cœlo-Syria and Palestine were at this time under the dominion of Seleucus Philopator: it is not known how he became possessed of them, as they had been ceded to Egypt by Antiochus the Great.

The piety and prudence of Onias tended to promote order and peace in Jerusalem, by establishing a steady observance of the laws; and thus "the city was inhabited with all peace," till the contentions among the sons of Joseph introduced division, and fomented a spirit of resentment and malice among the inhabitants. About this time Simon a Benjamite, who was governor of the temple, had some disagreement with Onias "about

disorder in the city." This Simon is supposed to have been one of the sons of Joseph; and the disorder here mentioned was probably some outrage committed by his party against that of Hyrcanus. However this may be, his resentment was expressed in an extraordinary manner. For he withdrew from Jerusalem, taking all his family with him; and repairing to Apollonius, who governed Cælo-Syria and Palestine for Seleucus, told him that immense treasures were laid up in the temple at Jerusalem. Apollonius immediately made this known to the king, who sent his treasurer Heliodorus to seize the treasure and bring it to him. On his arrival at Jerusalem, Heliodorus was kindly received by Onias, to whom he made known the cause of his visit. Onias assured him that the report made to the king was false; since all the money laid up in the temple did not exceed four hundred talents of silver and two hundred of gold; most of which was deposited there for the use of widows and fatherless children. Heliodorus however insisted on the execution of the king's command; and though Onias urged the sacred nature of the deposit, and the holiness of the place, which would be violated by its seizure, he fixed on a time for the removal of it. On the day appointed Heliodorus with some of his followers entered the precincts of the temple, to the great distress of Onias, and the consternation of the whole city. Open resistance was impossible, as it would have brought certain destruction on them; but they had one effectual resource, that of supplication to the God of Heaven, whose honour was infringed by this sacrilege. The priests fell down before the altar; and the people, flocking from all parts of the city, joined in prayer for the averting of this calamity. In the meantime, Helio-

deem, regardless of the distress he witnessed, pressed on towards the treasury; but he had scarcely entered it, when he was arrested by the arm of Omnipotence, and made to feel a terror very far exceeding that his tyrannical and impious conduct had occasioned. A glorious vision of a warrior completely armed, and mounted on a beautiful horse, struck the pagan and his followers with such dismay, that their courage utterly forsook them. The horse ran furiously towards Heliodorus, and struck him down with his fore feet; while two young men of extraordinary appearance chastised him with scourges. Heliodorus thus "cast down by the hand of God," and "unable to help himself with his weapons," was carried out by his terrified followers who manifestly acknowledged the power of God, when they saw their leader speechless and without hope of life. The Jews, on the other hand, praised the Lord, who had miraculously honoured his own place: and the temple, which had so lately been "full of fear and trouble, when the Almighty Lord appeared, was filled with joy and gladness." Heliodorus still continuing senseless, some of his friends applied to Onias, entreating him to call on the Most High, that he might be restored. Onias fearing that his death might be imputed to treachery on the part of the Jews, offered a sacrifice, and besought God on his behalf. The Lord was pleased to accept the atonement, and grant the prayer offered by Onias: but lest Heliodorus should attribute his recovery to a natural cause, the young men who had scourged him, again appeared; and standing beside him, desired that he would give great thanks to Onias, for whose sake the Lord had restored his life; and declare to all men the mighty power of that God by whom he had been scourged

from heaven. Having delivered this message they disappeared; and Heliodorus being restored to health offered a sacrifice, and made great vows to the Lord, who had saved his life. After this was done, he took leave of Onias; and returned with his host to the king: testifying to all men the works of the great God, which he had witnessed; and declaring to the king that an especial power of God was manifested in Jerusalem, for the defence and protection of the place.

The malice of Simon though defeated in this manner, was not appeased; for he still continued to oppose the good purposes of Onias, by exciting factions against him in Jerusalem; and even went so far as to accuse him of having practised on the credulity of Heliodorus to terrify him. One of Simon's party having committed several murders in Jerusalem, Onias determined on going to the king, for that redress which his governor Apollonius would not afford: for he saw no hope of peace till the practices of Simon were put an end to; and Apollonius, so far from discouraging them, only sought to increase and inflame the malice from which they originated. Onias accordingly went to Antioch; but he had not been long there before the king died. Seleucus had a brother named Antiochus, who had been sent as a hostage to the Romans, by his father Antiochus the Great, after he was overcome by them. Being desirous of his brother's return, the king sent his only son Demetrius to remain at Rome in his stead; but while the two princes were travelling in opposite directions, Heliodorus seized the opportunity of their absence to poison Seleucus and usurp the throne of Syria. Antiochus had arrived at Athens when the news of his brother's death, and the attempt of Heliodorus reached

him. He immediately applied to Euteneas king of Pergamus, and by promises of alliance and friendship, prevailed on him to assist in driving out the usurper, in which having succeeded, he took possession of the throne; though it belonged of right to his nephew Demetrius.

LETTER XXXI.

We must again recur to the prophet Daniel, who gives a short but accurate description of the character of Seleucus Philopator; and of the manner in which he died, in the twentieth verse of the chapter we have already noticed. Seleucus was indeed a "raiser of taxes;" for the tribute imposed by the Romans was to be paid during twelve years; and he had great difficulty in raising so large a sum annually, by taxing his people. His death also was neither in "anger nor in battle," yet he was "destroyed," as the prophet declared he should be, after a few years.

The successor of Seleucus was Antiochus, who took the name of Epiphanes (illustrious), though no title could be less characteristic. He was, as the prophet predicted, "a vile person," who came in peaceably and obtained the kingdom "by flatteries;" for not being the rightful heir, he could not receive "the honour of the kingdom." The reign of this prince was to the Jews lamentably eventful; and for this reason the prophecies respecting it are minute and full, occupying the rest of the chapter. I shall beg you to read them now, and to keep them in view as we proceed, that we may note

their accomplishment in the train of events we are about to consider.

Onias had sustained the office of high priest twenty-one years, when Antiochus ascended the throne of Syria; and during that time had done all that was in his power for the honour of God, and the welfare of his people. The piety of his character, the uprightness of his conduct, and the mildness of his government had endeared him to the Jewish nation in general; but these estimable qualities were not sufficient to secure his government from the opposition of the factions, or his person from the malice and treachery of the ambitious and designing. He had a brother named Jason, who was of a disposition totally different from his: for he was impious, crafty, and malicious. This man finding in Antiochus all the bad qualities he could desire for the effecting of his purposes, offered him a large sum of money to obtain the removal of Onias, and the appointment of himself to be high priest in his stead. The offer of Jason was readily accepted; but Onias was so much beloved, that he had no hope of being able to get possession of his ill acquired dignity, till his brother was removed. He therefore procured an order from the king to have him sent to Antioch, and confined there. Jason perceiving that he could obtain whatever he desired at the Syrian court for money, offered an additional sum of one hundred and fifty talents for permission to erect at Jerusalem a Gymnasium, and a public school for the education of youth, according to the manner of the Greeks. He desired also the privilege of making as many of the Jews as he thought proper citizens of Antioch; because some valuable immunities were accorded to the inhabitants of that city; and he concluded that his party would

be strengthened by the favour of all who coveted worldly advancement, if he had the power of conferring it. There were too many of this character already among the Jews; and the impious conduct of Jason tended to increase their number. The continual intercourse between the Greeks and Jews since the time of Alexander, had inclined many of the latter to favour the manners and customs of a people, who, in their own estimation at least, were considered so peculiarly refined, that all others were by them designated as barbarians:

Jason's scheme of corrupting the people, in order to prevent the restoration of Onias, was attended with complete success; for his example and influence encouraged many to declare their sentiments openly, and brought over others, who had hitherto been undecided, to follow the new manners he introduced, because they were fashionable. It is worthy of remark that he seems to have ingratiated himself especially with the young, for the advancement of his views. He well knew the force of habits formed in youth; and the readiness of young minds to receive and retain impressions, which are presented under a pleasing form. Under such a high priest and governor it is no wonder that the law of God was put down; and the service of his temple neglected. The people were engaged in games and customs contrary to law; and the priests left the altar to partake of them. Thus all the privileges granted by Seleucus Philopator, for the security of their freedom, and the exercise of their holy religion, were laid aside: and thus the protection of the Lord was forfeited, and his chastisements incurred. They preferred the glory of the Grecians to the distinctions which God had conferred on their forefathers; and the objects of their esteem were

made the instruments of their punishment. For "they had them to be their enemies and avengers, whose customs they followed so earnestly," and were soon taught by "sore calamity" that "it is not a light thing to do wickedly against the laws of God." Cleopatra, the mother and guardian of the young king of Egypt, died in the third year of Antiochus. During her life, that prince, who was her brother, had retained the undisputed possession of Coelo-Syria and Palestine; but the ministers who had the charge of her son, made no scruple to demand the restitution of those provinces, after her death; alleging that they belonged to Egypt, not only as being a part of the dominions assigned to Ptolemy Soter; but as having been given to the late queen on her marriage with Ptolemy Epiphanes. Antiochus totally denied the justice of their claim on either of these grounds; and positively refused to accede to their demand. The Egyptians therefore prepared to enforce it by arms; and the Syrian king was no less active in his measures to oppose them. His first care was to fortify the frontiers towards Egypt, and with this view coming by sea to Joppa, he visited Jerusalem, where he was received with great pomp, and magnificence, by Jason, and the whole city.

It was not long before Jason had to experience the same treachery as he had exercised towards his brother Onias. For Menelaus, another of his brothers, being sent by him to Antiochus with the tribute-money, first ingratiated himself with that prince by flattery, and then procured a grant of the high priest's office for himself, by offering three hundred talents more than Jason gave for it. When Menelaus returned to Jerusalem with the order for his appointment, a very strong party joined

him; but Jason had a force so superior to oppose him, that he was obliged to retire with his friends to Antioch. On their coming thither they declared that they would abjure the customs and laws of their country, and adopt the religion of the king, and the customs of the Greeks. Antiochus was so much pleased with this mean flattery, that he enforced the appointment of Menelaus, by sending him back to Jerusalem with a force superior to that of Jason, who, finding himself thus utterly supplanted, fled into the land of the Ammonites; and left the priesthood to his brother. Menelaus thus settled in his office, actually performed his promise of renouncing the religion of his father; and prevailed on many of his countrymen to follow him in that wretched apostacy: for he had not desired the dignity of high priest with the intention of fulfilling the duties belonging to it, but merely for the temporal jurisdiction connected with it. He had, however, been more ready to promise a sum of money to the king, than he now appeared to pay it. Antiochus therefore calling upon Sostratus the collector of his revenues, and the latter referring him to Menelaus for the money in question, the king summoned them both to appear before him at Antioch. When they arrived in that city, the king had left it, to suppress a commotion in Asia Minor, which gave Menelaus time to arrange his plans for the payment of the money; and to gain the favour of Andronicus, one of the king's favourites. He accordingly sent to Lysimachus, whom he had left as his deputy at Jerusalem, and desired him to steal some of the holy vessels out of the temple; and have them conveyed to him. When they arrived he presented some of them to Andronicus, and sold the rest at Tyre and other places, to raise the money for the king. This

infamous sacrifice being made known to Onias, who was still living in Antioch, he failed not to reprove Menelaus very sharply on account of it. The reproaches of this good man were so galling to the apostate, that he applied to Andronicus to have him put to death; but Onias, being informed of his malicious intention, fled to Daphne, and took refuge in an asylum which was deemed sacred. The revenge of Menelaus however still pursued him; for by the promise of a sum of money he prevailed on Andronicus to entice him from this retreat, and put him to death. This cruel murder was signally retaliated on the shameless perpetrator; for the character of Onias was held in such estimation by the people of Antioch, that both Jews and Greeks joined in a petition to the king, on his return, for the avenging of it. Antiochus, wicked as he was, expressed great regret for the death of this good man; and having fully investigated the matter, and established the guilt of Andronicus, he caused him to be stripped of his honours, and executed on the very spot where he had killed Onias. A striking contrast presents itself to the mind in the end of these two men. Andronicus justly put to death for his rapacious cruelty; and Onias the victim of his piety, integrity, and zeal for God's honour. To heathen philosophers the calamities and violent death of good men was an enigma which human reason vainly sought to explain; but the word of God, while it tells us that "the desire of the wicked shall perish," and that the end of him is that he shall be destroyed; assures us at the same time that the event is otherwise to the righteous, who, though man may not consider his sudden removal as a blessing, is certainly "taken away from evil to come." This truth was fully illustrated in

the death of Onias, who must have suffered greatly in witnessing the degeneracy of his countrymen; and who, had he lived much longer, would have been torn with anguish at the view of the miseries in which it involved them. Onias had held the office of high-priest twenty-four years at the time of his death: for though he had been confined at Antioch during the usurpations of Jason and Menelaus, he was still regarded as the lawful pontiff by all of his nation who had not abjured their religion. While Menelaus was at Antioch, the people of Jerusalem, having discovered that the sacred vessels were stolen, rose in great indignation against Lysimachus, by whom they had been removed. In order to disperse the multitude, he collected about three thousand of his party, and fell upon them. But the fury of the people was so great that they attacked his followers and put them to flight; and having seized Lysimachus inflicted a violent death on him as the punishment of his sacrilege.

Antiochus having completed his preparations for the war with Egypt, determined this year to commence it; and accordingly marched towards the frontiers of that country. He was met near Pelusium by the troops of Ptolemy, and having engaged them in battle, gained a considerable advantage over them. He made no other use of this victory than to fortify the border against any future attempt from Egypt; when this was done, he went back to Tyre, and settled his troops in winter quarters. While the king was at Tyre, three delegates were sent to him from the Jewish sanhedrim, to complain of the sacrilege committed by Menelaus, and the disorders he had occasioned in Jerusalem. The king was fully convinced of the guilt of Menelaus, and sentence was about to be pronounced against him, when he evaded

it by bribing one of the courtiers, not only to procure the remission of it on his behalf, but to have the delegates put to death as false accusers. The Tyrians were so struck with the injustice of this proceeding, and had so much pity for the sufferers, that they afforded them a signal testimony of regret in an honourable burial. The courtier who had lent his aid in this iniquitous transaction, was Ptolemy Macron, who had been governor of Cyprus for the king of Egypt; but in consequence of some pique had revolted from him, and delivered up that island to Antiochus. The king had received him into the number of his friends, and accorded him the government of Cælo-Syria and Palestine. As he will be a principal actor in the sad scenes we are shortly to witness, I have taken this opportunity of introducing him to you by name.

LETTER XXXII.

ABOUT this time strange appearances were seen in the air, by the people of Jerusalem. Warriors armed and in battle array, encountered each other, as if contending for victory: and this not once, nor twice, but during forty successive days. The beholders of this astonishing sight prayed that it might betoken some good to the city; but their foreboding fears taught them to regard it as a presage of evil.

When the winter was over, Antiochus renewed the war, and advancing again towards Egypt, defeated another army sent against him by Ptolemy. After this he took Pelusium, and thereby gained an entrance into

the heart of the kingdom. He had acquired much influence with the people of Egypt by a singular clemency in the late battle, when he spared all the vanquished, whom he could have destroyed. As he advanced, therefore, he met with little opposition; and was soon in possession of Memphis, and all the other considerable cities except Alexandria. While he was thus successful, a report of his death was circulated in Palestine, which being generally believed, Jason, with a thousand men came suddenly to Jerusalem, intent upon recovering the office from which he had been removed. With the assistance of his followers, and a party in the city who favoured his cause, he succeeded in defeating Menelaus, and obliged him to take refuge in the castle. When he had thus got possession of the city, he acted with the greatest cruelty; putting to death all whom he considered as adverse to his cause. Antiochus being informed of what was passing in Jerusalem, concluded that the Jews had rebelled against him; therefore he marched without delay into Judea to quell the insurrection. His displeasure was greatly increased when he found that the report of his death had caused great rejoicings among them; and laying siege to the city, he soon obtained an entrance by force of arms. His rage against the wretched inhabitants was without bounds; he slew forty thousand of them in the course of three days, and having taken as many alive, sold them for slaves. But this barbarity, great as it was, did not satisfy his fury: he knew something of the national veneration for the temple; and therefore resolved to offer the utmost indignity to that holy place. It is not improbable that the vessels of gold and other valuable ornaments excited his avarice; while his dis-

pleasure afforded a pretext for gratifying it. However it was, he entered the temple, conducted by the infamous Menelaus, and proceeding even to the most holy place, pulled down all the ornaments, and took away all the vessels of gold, the value of which amounted to eighteen hundred talents. Not content with this sacrilege, he impiously caused every part of the temple to be polluted that it might thenceforth be unfit for divine service. You are probably surprised that the Lord suffered this profanation of his holy temple, without manifesting; as on former occasions, the terrors of his wrath against the impious intruder. But you are to consider that "The Lord chose the place for the sake of the people, and not the people for the sake of the place." When therefore by impiety and iniquity they had departed from him, grievous chastisements were needful to recal them. The security and peace they had enjoyed under the government of Antiochus the Great, and the priesthood of Onias, had most probably lessened their dependence on the Divine Protection; while the signal interpositions of God in behalf of the sanctuary had doubtless excited a superstitious veneration for the place, independent of Him who had chosen it to put his name there. He had made their hill so strong that they were ready to say they should never be moved; and they required to be taught, by the hiding of his face, that their strength was not in the temple; but in him who dwelt therein. When Antiochus left Jerusalem, he appointed a Phrygian named Philip to be governor there; and continued Menelaus in the office of high priest. The characters of these two men were in unison with his own; he could not therefore have expressed his hatred to the Jews more effectually than by leaving them in

such hands. Jason, who, in one sense, was the author of all these calamities, had no sooner heard of the king's approach, than he fled to avoid his vengeance: but he could not flee from the presence of God, nor escape the pursuit of his justice. He was driven from place to place, till at last he died in Lacedemonia, a wretched outcast from the country he had ruined; and forsaken by that God whose service he had abjured. Antiochus, in his late expedition to Egypt, having by some means got the young king Ptolemy Philometor into his power, the people of Alexandria placed his younger brother on the throne: This gave the king of Syria a pretext for invading that country the following year, in order to restore, as he said, the lawful sovereign; but in reality to get possession of the whole kingdom. Being again successful in battle, he proceeded to Alexandria, and laid siege to that place. Finding however that he had little chance of success, he pretended compliance with the mediation of the Rhodians; and consented to restore Ptolemy Philometor: hoping that the brothers, by mutual opposition, would ruin each other; and thus render the conquest of their kingdom easy to him. In this hope he was disappointed; for he had no sooner quitted Egypt than Philometor, who perceived his crafty intentions, proposed an accommodation with his brother, on condition that they should reign jointly. The terms of this union being agreed to, peace was restored to Egypt; but as the brothers had every thing to fear from the disappointment of Antiochus, they made such preparations as might enable them to resist him. These precautions were not in vain; for he was greatly enraged when he found all his views frustrated, and throwing off the mask of friendship, he again entered Egypt, declaring

war against both the brothers. On this occasion, however, an unexpected event put an end to his designs on that country: for the Romans having been applied to during the last siege of Alexandria, sent an embassy to desire that the war between Syria and Egypt should be immediately concluded; declaring themselves enemies to that party who should persist in it. The rage of Antiochus was very great against the Romans, but as he durst not express it towards them, he barbarously vented his fury upon the Jews, who at this time had done nothing to offend him. As he marched through Palestine, on his return homewards, he sent a detachment of twenty-two thousand men to Jerusalem, with orders to destroy the place. Apollonius who commanded them, behaved peaceably on his arrival: concealing the purport of it till the following Sabbath, when the people being assembled in their synagogues, he let loose his soldiers upon them, commanding that all the men should be massacred, and the women and children taken for slaves. This dreadful order was fatally executed on all they could find, till the whole place was filled with carnage. After this the soldiers, having secured every thing that was valuable, set fire to the city in several places, demolished the houses, and pulled down the walls. With the materials these afforded, they erected a fortress on an eminence which overlooked the temple, and left in it a strong garrison of soldiers. These, whenever any of the Jews went to worship in the temple, fell upon them, and put them to death; so that the sanctuary was defiled by the blood of the slain, and the daily sacrifices were made to cease; because neither the priests nor the people durst go thither to worship. Antiochus however was not content with preventing the

service of the God of Israel ; for he determined to compel the Jews every where in his dominions, to conform in the worship of his idols. For this purpose he made a decree, as soon as he reached Antioch, that all his subjects should abandon their religious rites, and adopt his. He was advised to this measure by Ptolemy Macroa, as an effectual one for extirpating the Jewish nation and religion at the same time. In order to carry this decree into effect he sent overseers into all the provinces to instruct the people in the new ritual, and enforce the observance of it. His heathen subjects readily conformed to his will ; because one idol was to them the same as another. The Samaritans also were prompt to obey the king's orders, lest they should be regarded as Jews. They had no objection to claim affinity with that nation when by so doing they could share in its privileges ; but now that the case was altered they openly declared themselves to be Medes and Persians, and supported their declaration by desiring that their temple on Mount Gerizim might be dedicated to the Grecian Jupiter. Antiochus complied with their request, and ordered that they should not be farther molested. It had been well for the Jews if the Samaritans only had apostatized ; but too many of them also abjured their holy faith ; and joining the king's officers, became the most bitter persecutors of their brethren. The king's overseer who came to Jerusalem was named Athenæus. On his arrival, all the ordinances and rites of worship were suppressed ; the sabbath was profaned ; the sacred Scriptures destroyed wherever they could be found ; and all persons who were known to observe any of the laws of God were put to death by the Syrian soldiers. These severities however had not all the effect that was ex-

pected from them; for many in Israel resolved to obey God rather than man, and yielded their lives as a willing sacrifice to his honour. The temple of the Lord was now converted into a heathen temple, and dedicated to Jupiter Olympias; whose image being set up on the altar of burnt-offerings, sacrifices were offered to it on another altar erected for that purpose. Nor was it in Jerusalem only that these abominations were enforced; for officers were sent to all the cities of Judea, with authority to erect idol altars, and compel the people to partake of the sacrifices, and join in their processions.

LETTER XXXIII.

THE prophet Daniel had declared respecting this persecution of Antiochus, that the people should fall by the sword and by flame, by captivity and by spoil, many days; but that they who knew their God should be strong, and do exploits. The former declaration had been lamentably verified during six months, when it pleased the Lord to grant the means of deliverance to his suffering people. One of the king's commissioners named Apelles came to Modin, to initiate the people of that place in the heathen rites; and to superintend the observance of them. On his arrival he called the inhabitants together, and told them the purport of his visit; then addressing himself to a principal person among them, named Mattathias, a priest of the course of Joarib, he exhorted him to comply with the king's orders; as his example would have great weight with

the rest of the people. Mattathias indignantly withstood the persuasion of the king's officer, though it was accompanied by promises of the royal favour, for himself and his family. He declared in the hearing of all the people, that nothing should ever induce him to depart from the covenant of his God; neither would he; nor any of his family, obey the king's command in this matter. At this moment a Jew approaching to sacrifice to the idol, Mattathias executed the law of God upon the apostate by slaying him; and then turning upon Apelles and his followers, with the assistance of his sons and some others, he put them to death also. After this he collected his little band, with the rest of his family, and retired to the mountains of Judea: calling upon all who were zealous for the law of God to follow him. Many who heard what he had done, resorted to him; and others, who had fled from persecution in different cities, followed his example by retreating to the deserts. To these St. Paul alludes in his epistle to the Hebrews, when he says, "They wandered in deserts and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth."* About this time Philip the governor of Jerusalem being informed that a thousand of them were concealed in the wilderness near that city, went out with a party of soldiers against them. He at first called upon them to submit, and obey the king's command; promising that their past disobedience should be forgiven; but as they positively refused his conditions, he attacked them on the sabbath day, when he knew they would not defend themselves; and put them all to death: not even sparing the women and children. When Mattathias and his company heard of this melancholy transaction,

* Hebrews xi. 28.

they were much grieved for the loss of their brethren ; but perceiving that a similar fate awaited all the Jews, if they allowed the enemy to massacre them on the sabbath day without resistance, they came to a resolution to defend themselves when assaulted on that day. By consent of the priests and elders among them this resolution was passed into a decree for their future conduct ; and was made known to all who were dispersed throughout the land, on account of this persecution. Antiochus finding that his orders met with considerable opposition in Judea, came to Jerusalem in person. He doubtless expected that the terror of his presence, and the cruelty of his conduct, would induce universal submission ; but in this he was disappointed : for there were many who feared the King of kings ; and consented to be " tortured, not accepting deliverance," rather than renounce their confidence in him. Among these was Eleazar, a venerable man, eighty years of age. He was urged to comply with the king's command only in appearance, by coming to an idol festival, and bringing his own meat with him. But he scorned this wretched subterfuge, alleging the folly of deceit in the presence of an Omniscient Being ; and the mischief that would result from his example, were he to appear as an apostate. His heathen friends finding their persuasions ineffectual, left him to his sentence ; and he died in the midst of torments ; declaring that his soul was content to suffer them, rather than cast off the fear of that God, to whom, living or dead, he was accountable. In like manner seven brothers were brought before the king, and put to death by the most cruel tortures. They steadily adhered to their faith, and mocked the impotent rage of the tyrant, who could not injure

their souls ; while their mother exhorted them to suffer courageously, that she might receive them again, through the mercy of God ; and at last resigned her own life also, in the hope of a blessed resurrection. In the meantime Mattathias and his party lay concealed among the mountains, where it was hardly possible the enemy could get access to them. His numbers daily increased ; and his strength was greatly augmented by a company of Assideans, who were men peculiarly devoted to the defence of the temple and the Jewish religion ; and distinguished by their zeal and valour in the sacred cause they had voluntarily espoused.

As soon as Antiochus had quitted Jerusalem, Mattathias, finding himself at the head of a little army, sallied forth from his concealment ; and entering the towns and villages, threw down the idol altars, put to death the apostates and persecutors wherever he found them, and enforced the observance of the law of God, which they had sought to abolish. When Antiochus had commenced the persecution of the Jews, he gave particular orders that all copies of their scriptures should be taken from them ; justly concluding that ignorance or neglect of them, would cause a forgetfulness and neglect of that God whose laws they contained. Mattathias having recovered some copies from the heathen, caused the public reading of them to be resumed in the synagogues ; and restored the worship of God wherever he came. But this holy man, being advanced in years, did not long sustain the fatigue of this zealous warfare. When he found his end approaching, he called his sons around him, and exhorted them to adhere faithfully and courageously to the covenant of their God ; reminding them by the examples and experience of Abraham and

other worthies of the Old Testament, that, "none who put their trust in him shall be overcome." He appointed Simon to be their counsellor, and Judas to be their captain, desiring them to take heed to the law of God, to protect all who observed it, and avenge the wrongs of their people upon the heathen. The death of Mattathias caused great mourning in Israel; but it was soon found that the Lord had given him a worthy successor in Judas, who took the surname of Maccabeus,* and led forth his little army to the cities of Judea, as his father had done, to extirpate idolatry. Success attended his arms wherever he went, for he not only drove out the persecutors, but rebuilt the walls and fortresses of the several cities; placing strong garrisons in them for the protection of the inhabitants. By these means he became so powerful, that Apollonius the governor of Samaria thought it high time to oppose his progress; and for this purpose took the field with a considerable force. Judas did not await his coming; but marching forth valiantly to give him battle, gained a complete victory. Apollonius was among the slain, and his spoils with those of his followers, were a great acquisition to the Jewish warriors. Seron, another Syrian officer, hearing what had befallen Apollonius, determined to avenge his death, and acquire a splendid reputation by the destruction of Judas and his valiant band. But his triumph was only imaginary; for he also was defeated and slain by them in battle. On the approach of Seron the followers of Judas had expressed some terror on account of the numbers they had to en-

* This surname was formed from the initial letters of the Hebrew motto on his standard, "Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods?" See Exodus xv. 11.

counter; but their leader reminding them that their strength was in God, who could deliver with many or with few, rushed forward with an impetuosity that was no less encouraging to his own party, than appalling and irresistible to the enemy. The defeat of these two armies by a handful of men, caused the fame of Judas to extend not only to the neighbouring nations, but to Antioch, where the king resided. The fury of Antiochus on this occasion knew no bounds; he gave immediate orders for collecting the whole force of his dominions: intending to march at their head, and extirpate the whole Jewish nation, without delay. But when he looked into his treasury for the sums required in this expedition, he found himself obliged to suspend it: for his continual prodigality, and the foolish games he had been celebrating, had exhausted his stores. These however were not the only causes of his poverty, for though as the prophet Daniel foretold, "he scattered among his followers the prey and the spoil and riches," his immense revenues would have sufficed for all his extravagance; but the changes he had insisted on throughout his dominions had caused his subjects to rebel and withhold the annual tribute: so that not only in Judea where most of the inhabitants had been driven into exile, but in Armenia and Persia also, the standard of revolt was set up against him. "Tidings" from these two countries came to "trouble him," just as he was projecting the destruction of the Jews; in consequence of which he was obliged to divide his forces: taking one half with him, for the reduction of the revolters; and leaving the rest under the command of Lysias, for the invasion of Judea. The king's orders to Lysias were, to extirpate the Jews, and people their land with strangers; and he was urged to the speedy fulfilment

of them; by the reports of Judas's progress, sent to him by Ptolemy Macron and Philip the Phrygian. He therefore collected an army of forty-seven thousand men; and put them under the command of Ptolemy, who, with Nicanor and Gorgias, led them towards Jerusalem, and encamped at Emmaus. The Syrians made themselves so sure of victory, that Nicanor invited a great company of merchants to attend the army, for the purchase of the vanquished, ninety of whom he promised to sell for a talent. Judas in the meantime led his followers to Mizpeh, and there appointing a solemn fast, supplicated help and protection from the Lord. His little troop did not exceed six thousand men, and when proclamation was made that all who were fearful, or who chose to avail themselves of the permission given by their law,* might depart, it was reduced to half that number. These, however, though indifferently armed, resolved to engage the enemy; and fight for their people and their sanctuary: humbly committing the event to the God of their fathers. Judas therefore marched towards Jerusalem, and pitching his camp near that of the enemy, desired his followers to be ready for battle the next morning. But after this he received intelligence that Gorgias was coming that night to cut him off by surprise; and had left the Syrian camp with six thousand chosen men, for that purpose. Judas resolved not only to frustrate his scheme, but to turn it to his own account, by attacking the Syrian camp in the absence of Gorgias. His success was as complete as his arrival was unexpected: for the enemy fled in confusion, leaving their camp to the victors, and three thousand of their men slain in the encounter.

Judas prudently withheld his men from pursuing their

* Deuteronomy xx. 5—8.

enemies, or taking the spoil : reminding them that Gorgias was still to be overcome. While he was speaking, the troop under that commander appeared in sight ; but when they saw what had taken place, they declined fighting, and fled. Judas then pursued them and slew six thousand of the fugitives ; as, however, the following day was the sabbath, he did not allow the ardour of his men to carry them far from their camp ; but conducted them back to celebrate that holy day with praise and thanksgiving for this wonderful deliverance. On the following day they divided the spoils, among which they found the money that the merchants had brought, to purchase them for slaves. Judas, encouraged by this success, and strengthened by the numbers that joined him on hearing of it, determined to follow up the advantage he had gained ; and having learned that Timotheus and Bacchides, two other Syrian generals, were coming against him with a considerable force, he marched forth to meet them, and obtained a signal victory. Nicanor, who it seems was in this battle also, escaped with his life ; but was obliged to flee in disguise. When he reached Antioch after so disgraceful a failure, he was compelled in his own defence, to ascribe his defeat to the power of God, who he said fought for his people, " because they followed the laws that he gave them." Lysias the governor was much perplexed respecting the affairs of Judea ; but knowing the king's desire to root out the name and nation of the Jews, he raised an army of sixty-five thousand men, and marching with them into Judea, encamped at Bethsura. At this place Judas met him with a force of ten thousand, routed his army and caused him to flee, no less astonished at this unexpected defeat, than at the undaunted valour of his opponents. After this

victory, Judas proposed to his followers the recovery of Jerusalem and the restoration of the temple worship ; to which they having agreed, he led them thither. These valiant men who had stood unmoved before a host of enemies, were quite subdued with grief at the desolation of their much loved city, and holy temple, which exhibited a scene of ruin and profanation too shocking to behold. Judas divided his men into two companies; one of which he appointed to repel any attack that might be made from the fortress built by Apollonius ; and the other he kept with himself to assist in the work he had undertaken. Having chosen "priests of blameless conversation, such as had pleasure in the law," he appointed them to cleanse the sanctuary by removing all the vestiges of heathen worship, and building a new altar, instead of that which had been profaned. He also made holy vessels of gold and silver, for the temple service ; instead of those Antiochus had taken away : the materials for these had been abundantly furnished by the rich spoils he had taken from the enemy. When all things were ready, a day was fixed for the solemn dedication of the altar, exactly three years after it had been profaned. This dedication was celebrated about the time of the winter solstice ; and Judas not only kept it during eight days, "offering burnt offerings with gladness," and "worshipping and praising the God of heaven ;" but appointed an annual commemoration of it to be observed in like manner, which was accordingly done till the destruction of the temple by Titus.* Though the sanctuary was thus cleansed and restored, the worshipers who came thither were in danger of being assailed from the fortress ; since

* This festival our Lord honoured by his presence ; as we are told by St. John, chapter x. 22.

Judas could not spare men enough to keep up the blockade of it. To obviate this danger he fortified the mountain on which the temple was built, and placed a garrison there sufficient for its defence. The southern parts of Judea had been long in the hands of the Edomites or Idumeans, who by frequent incursions harassed the Jews. To remedy this evil Judas fortified Bethsura, a town which lay between Hebron and Jerusalem, as a barrier against them.

LETTER XXXIV.

WHEN the neighbouring nations heard that the Jews had recovered their city, and restored the worship of God in his temple, they were filled with envious rage; and determined to act in concert with Antiochus for their utter destruction. But the impious career of that wicked prince was drawing to a close; and he ended it by a death as horrible as the actions of his life had been. His progress into Persia to enforce the payment of the tribute had not been very successful; and on his attempting to plunder a temple there, the inhabitants of the country had risen upon him, and obliged him to make a shameful retreat to Ecbatana in Media. Here he received the news of Nicanor's defeat, which so greatly enraged him, that he immediately set out on his return: threatening the utmost vengeance against the Jews. On the road, another messenger informed him of the victory obtained by the Jews over Lysias; and of the recovery of Jerusalem by Judas. This news rendered him quite furious; and he commanded his charioteer to

double his speed, that he might execute his purpose on the Jews, by making Jerusalem a burying-place for the whole nation.

The chastisement which God had appointed for his people was, however, now at an end; since it had brought them to repentance; and the instrument of it was to feel, in his turn, some of the torments he had inflicted. Antiochus in the midst of his impious threats was overtaken by the judgment of God, and struck with a mortal disease, which no art or medicines could alleviate. Notwithstanding this, he persisted in his journey, till his chariot was overturned; and severe bruises were added to his internal sufferings. Being put into a litter, he was carried to a town on the confines of Persia, where his disorder rose to such a height, that he became insufferable to himself and those about him. The torments of his body were equalled, if not surpassed by those of his mind; for conscience reminded him of the cruelties he had committed against the Jews; and the profanation of the temple of God at Jerusalem. Now he vowed to confer benefits on that people; and to present costly gifts for the use of the sanctuary: but his vows were rejected, and his prayers unanswered by the Almighty Being against whom he had so furiously raged, and so madly exalted himself. The character of this miserable prince is conspicuous in his conduct towards the Jews, and corresponds not only with that foreshown by the prophet, but with the account of heathen writers also, who instead of his surname Epiphanes, give him that of Epimanes (the madman). I wish you now to consider the events of his reign in connexion with the predictions of Daniel. (Chap. xi.) His character, the manner of his obtaining the kingdom, and his prodiga-

lity are depicted in verses 21, 22, 24. The deposition of Onias, the priest or "prince of the covenant," and the league made with Jason, but afterwards deceitfully violated in favour of Menelaus, are predicted in verses 22, 23. His expeditions into Egypt, the success of them, and the spoil he took from thence are foreshewn in verses 25, 40, 42, 43. The misconduct of Ptolemy's ministers, the pretended regard of Antiochus for that young prince, his eating at the same table, and their mutual distrust, are declared in verses 26, 27. The vengeance of Antiochus against the Jews for rejoicing at the report of his death during his second expedition to Egypt, and his profanation of the temple are found in verse 28. His third invasion of Egypt, which was neither like the first nor the second, in its ostensible motive or termination (for Antiochus had thrown off the mask, and avowed his design of seizing the kingdom for himself), and the arrival of Grecian vessels, with the Roman Ambassadors, who, to his grief and vexation, put an end to his projects, are clearly pointed out in verses 29, 30. His rage against the Jews, on his return, when he sent Apollonius to destroy Jerusalem; his decree to establish the Grecian rites of idolatry throughout his dominions; his setting up an idol in the sanctuary; his encouragement of the apostates; the persecution that ensued; the constancy and valour of those, who in the strength of God, withstood him; all these are contained in verses 30 to 36. The tidings from Armenia and Persia, which prevented his last threatened invasion of Judea; his return with a furious desire to destroy the Jews utterly; and his miserable end, in which *none* could help him, are foretold in verses 44, 45. Such is the wonderful agreement between this series of prophecy, and the train of events by

which it was circumstantially accomplished. Porphyry, a learned heathen, and one of the early opposers of Christianity, was so struck with this correspondence, that he found no way of resisting conviction, but by denying the authenticity of the Book of Daniel. He therefore laboured to prove the truth of the historical events in order to falsify the prophecy: alleging that it must have been written by some other person than Daniel, after the time of Antiochus Epiphanes, because the events were so exactly described. In the book he wrote, many authors were quoted whose writings are since lost; and though his work is not now extant, some extracts from it yet remain, which help to establish the truths he endeavoured to overturn.

Antiochus Epiphanes was succeeded by his son, a child nine years of age, whom he committed to the guardianship of Philip one of his chief ministers. But Lysias, who was with the young prince at Antioch, usurped this office, and placing him on the throne by the title of Antiochus Eupator, governed the kingdom in his name. About this time Ptolemy Maeson became friendly towards the Jews; not only remitting his former persecutions, but seeking to make peace for them at the court of Syria. The courtiers who were averse to this measure, represented him as a traitor to the king, in consequence of which he was deprived of his government. Though he could bear to be a traitor, he could not endure to have the epithet bestowed on him, nor to lose the fruits of his treachery; he therefore chose the wretched alternative of suicide, and put an end to his life by poison.

LETTER XXXV.

WE are now to return to Judas, whom we left exposed to the threats of the surrounding nations. Some of them had already begun to fulfil their menaces by putting to death such Jews as dwelt among them. The Edomites and Ammonites having been most forward in these cruelties, Judas marched against them, gained several victories, slew great numbers of them, and took many of their towns and villages. Timotheus who was governor for the king of Syria, on the eastern side of Jordan, being enraged at the incursion made on his province, collected a large army for the invasion of Judea. Judas and his valiant band, confiding in the strength of their Almighty Protector, went out to meet and engage this warlike multitude. Again the Lord fought for Israel, and again their enemies were subdued before them. Twenty-five thousand were left on the field of battle; and Timotheus fleeing disgracefully, took refuge in Gazara, of which place Chereas his brother was governor. Judas quickly followed him thither, laid siege to the place, and having reduced it in five days put Timotheus and his brother to death, with Apollophanes another of the Syrian leaders. This victory was celebrated by the Jews with psalms of praise and thanksgiving to the God of Israel, who had given them such power over their enemies; and so wonderfully delivered them from the rage of those who had risen against them. The heathen nations, on the other hand, more enraged than ever at this defeat, in which many of their relations had been slain, determined to take vengeance on all the Jews they could find. In the land of Gilead a thousand

were massacred, and such as could escape, were closely besieged in a fortress where they had taken refuge. These sent to beg immediate succour from Judas ; as did also the Jews of Galilee who were threatened with destruction from their neighbours. Judas having consulted the sanhedrim, and doubtless sought the help of God, divided his forces into three bodies; one of which he sent under his brother Simon into Galilee ; another he left for the protection of Jerusalem ; and with the third he marched to the relief of his distressed brethren in Gilead. These little armaments were completely successful. In Galilee Simon fought many battles against the enemies of his people and invariably overcame them ; but as the Jews dwelling in those parts were continually exposed to the malice of their heathen neighbours, he gathered them together, with all their property, and led them into Judea ; where they were settled in some of the cities which had been depopulated by Antiochus Epiphanes. Judas and Jonathan arrived to rescue their countrymen in Gilead, on the very day appointed for a general assault on those in the fortress, and a massacre of all others in the neighbouring cities. The assailants, terrified at the name of Judas, fled on his approach ; but he did not suffer them to escape : for he pursued them, and slew above eight thousand of their number. After this he besieged and took several places where the Jews had been oppressed, and having slain the persecutors and burned their cities, he returned in triumph to Jerusalem. On the return of the victorious troops, great rejoicings were made, and many offerings were presented in token of their thankfulness. It was found on numbering them, that though they had fought so many battles, both in Gilead and in Galilee, not a single man

had been killed or was missing : this they considered as a signal display of the Lord's mercy and favour towards them. It was however far otherwise with the remnant that had been left at Jerusalem. Judas had committed them to the charge of Joseph and Azarias, two of his captains, with strict orders to act only on the defensive. But the valiant exploits of Judas and Simon excited their ardour to achieve something that might render them famous also. With this view they led forth their troops to Jamnia, a sea-port on the Mediterranean, and endeavoured to seize the place. But Gorgias who was in the neighbourhood fell upon them and put them to flight, with the loss of two thousand of their men. These captains fighting for their own glory, contrary to the command of their appointed leader, had no share in that special protection which the Lord vouchsafed to those who went forth in his strength, to deliver their brethren and execute vengeance on the heathens who oppressed them. When Lysias heard what Judas and his brothers had done in Gilead and Galilee, he marched against them with an army of eighty-thousand men, and entering Judea, laid siege to Bethsura. The people of Jerusalem finding such an overwhelming force in their immediate neighbourhood, made humble supplications with tears to their Almighty Deliverer, praying him to appoint a way of escape for them. After this, Judas arming himself for the encounter, encouraged his men to follow him, and went forth to meet the enemy. He came up with them while they yet lay at Bethsura ; and falling on them with his usual confidence and valour gained a complete victory. More than twelve thousand of the Syrians were slain, and the rest found their safety in a disgraceful flight. Lysias, now become weary of

continual losses and defeats, began to perceive that the Jews were aided by an Almighty Power. He therefore proposed terms of peace, in which it was stipulated that the decrees of Antiochus Epiphanes against them should be annulled; and that they should be left to the enjoyment of religious and civil government, according to their own laws. The peace thus obtained was not of long duration; for the enemies of the Jews who dwelt among them soon infringed it, when Lysias was returned to Antioch. Nicanor and Apollonius took all opportunities of harassing them; and Timotheus (supposed to be the son of him who was slain the preceding year) recommenced the persecutions in Gilead. The first outrage was committed by the people of Joppa, who drowned two hundred Jews in the sea. Judas fell upon them by night, slew many of the people, and burnt their ships. Then proceeding to Jamnia, where he learned that the Jews were to be cut off by the heathen inhabitants, he inflicted a similar punishment on them. After this he led his forces into Gilead against Timotheus, who with more than a hundred and twenty thousand men, lay encamped at a place called Raphon, near the river Jabbock. Judas gained a complete victory over this numerous host; and Timotheus fell into the hands of two of his captains, who spared his life on condition that he should release many of the Jews who were in his power. Judas followed up this victory by taking and destroying several towns where the fugitives had taken refuge. In all of these he found considerable spoils, with which he returned towards Judea; taking with him the Jews who had dwelt in Gilead, and settling them with their families, where they would be more safe: as Simon had done by the Jews of Galilee. The time of Judas's

return was about the feast of Pentecost, which was celebrated at Jerusalem with great gladness on account of the victories God had given his people over their oppressors; and the special protection he had afforded them in the midst of such a perilous warfare; since not one of them had been slain. After the festival Judas went out against the Edomites, who, abetted by Gorgias, still continued their persecution of the Jews. In the battle then fought, Judas eventually gained the victory; but some of his men were slain. The day following was the Sabbath, which the Jews kept in a neighbouring city. When it was over, they returned to the field of battle to bury their dead; and then discovered the cause of their being slain: for about the persons of all were found things that had been consecrated to the idols of Jamnia, which were not lawful for them to keep.* The people praised God for this manifestation of his righteousness; and besought him to turn away from the nation those judgments which were due to the transgression of his laws. They also made a collection amounting to two thousand drachms, which they sent to Jerusalem to purchase sin offerings for the expiation of the national guilt. The arms of Judas still prevailed over the Edomites till he had made himself master of their chief city Hebron. He then extended his conquests to several cities of the Philistines: pulling down their altars, and burning their images wherever he came. In this manner all enemies abroad being subdued, Judas turned his attention to the garrison which still occupied the fortress in Jerusalem; and laid a vigorous siege to it. Some of the apostates who were in the fortress knowing they could expect no mercy if it

* Deuteronomy vii. 25, 26. See also Joshua vii.

were taken, contrived to escape, and going to Antioch, made such a representation to the king, that he determined to march to the relief of the garrison in person. An army of a hundred and twenty thousand men, with three hundred chariots, and thirty-two elephants, was quickly put in motion, and entering Judea on the south again besieged Bethsura. Judas led his troops to the scene of action, and falling on the enemy in the night, slew about four thousand of them. When it was day, the two armies engaged, and the Jews fought valiantly; but finding that they were likely to be overpowered by numbers, they retreated to Jerusalem. Eleazar, one of the brothers of Judas, lost his life during the battle by a rash attempt on one of the elephants, which, from the richness of its caparison, he took to be the king's. For rushing furiously into the heat of the fray, he got under the beast and pierced it with his spear; but the animal falling on him, he was crushed to death. After Judas had retreated, the Syrians resumed the siege of Bethsura; and though the Jews defended it courageously, they could not hold out long, for want of provisions; but were obliged to surrender on terms of safety for themselves and their property. From Bethsura Antiochus went to Jerusalem and laid siege to the Sanctuary. Here also the besieged were in want of provisions, and must have yielded, had not an unforeseen event called the Syrian army home. Philip, to whom Antiochus Epiphanes had left the guardianship of the young prince and his kingdom, taking advantage of the absence of Lysias, had seized Antioch, and assumed the reins of government. This obliged Lysias to make peace with the Jews, on terms very advantageous to them. The king, having sworn to the articles, was admitted

within the fortifications ; but when he saw the strength of them, no longer regarding his oath, he caused them to be demolished. Menelaus the high priest had accompanied the king, in the hope of being reinstated in his office : but Lysias justly regarding him as the author of the war which he had carried on with such continual loss, and terminated so disgracefully, accused him to the king, who caused him to be put to death. The office of high priest was now conferred on Alcimus, a man as wicked as Menelaus, to the exclusion of the lawful successor Onias. The latter, shocked at this injustice, fled from Antioch, and went into Egypt, where we shall have occasion to notice him by and by.

LETTER XXXVI.

DEMETRIUS the son of Seleucus Philopator, who had been sent to Rome as a hostage by his father, and who was the rightful heir to the crown of Syria, had frequently solicited the senate for his release. But as they paid no attention to his request, he contrived to escape privately, and going into Syria declared that he was sent by the Romans to take possession of his kingdom. This being generally believed, the friends of Eupator considered his case desperate, and therefore yielded to Demetrius. The young prince and his guardian Lysias being betrayed and given up by their own soldiers, were put to death. The appointment of Alcimus was very displeasing to the Jews, who refused to receive him, because he had conformed to many of the Grecian customs. On this refusal he gathered the apostate Jews

who dwelt at Antioch, and joined with them in a petition against Judas : representing him as the persecutor of the king's friends, who had expelled them on account of their conformity to the decrees of Antiochus Epiphanes. Demetrius, on hearing this, was greatly provoked ; and having confirmed Alcimus in his office, sent him to Jerusalem with a considerable force under the command of Bacchides, to make war upon Judas. On their arrival in Judea they endeavoured to get Judas and his brothers into their power by an artful display of friendship ; but Judas was too well aware of the character of Alcimus to trust him ; and the event justified his caution ; for others who were more credulous, fell into the snare and were put to death. Among these were sixty Assideans, and several scribes. After some time, Bacchides returned into Syria, leaving some of his forces with Alcimus, who for a while had influence and power to maintain a party in his favour, and thus disturbed the peace of the nation. But when Judas again took the field, Alcimus being no longer able to stand against him, had recourse to the Syrians ; representing to Demetrius that while Judas lived, there was no hope of peace in Judea. The king's ministers out of hatred to the Jews, having confirmed the assertion of Alcimus, another army was sent under the command of Nicanor, with orders to destroy Judas, disperse his followers, and establish Alcimus in his office of high priest. Nicanor, however, who knew that it was more easy to give these orders than to execute them ; and who had had some experience of the prowess of Judas, did not like to expose himself to another defeat ; but endeavoured to conclude the war by treaty. Judas and he having agreed on the terms, awaited only the king's ratification of them ;

Alcimus prejudiced him so greatly against the measure, that he commanded Nicanor to continue the war, though he had slain or taken Judas. Being thus obliged to cede from the terms he had made, and not liking to risk a battle, Nicanor sought to get Judas into his power by treachery. He therefore went to Jerusalem and invited him to a conference; but the snare was discovered time enough to prevent its taking effect; and Judas losing all confidence in the crafty Syrian, prepared to repel him by force of arms. In the first action which took place, Nicanor was defeated with the loss of five thousand men. He was so greatly enraged at this that he went to Jerusalem and demanded that Judas and his followers should be delivered up to him: threatening that unless his demands were complied with, he would come again and pull down the altar and burn the temple. To these menaces he added many blasphemies against the God of Israel; vowing to level his temple with the ground, and erect one to Bacchus in the place of it. The priests and people humbly besought God to regard the place which he had appointed for his holy worship, and the house which he had chosen for a house of prayer; that the impious threats of Nicanor might be averted from it. Soon after this, Nicanor encamped at Bethoron, where he was joined by a Syrian reinforcement. Judas in the meantime was at Adasa, with only three thousand men; but they were strong in faith, and determined to engage the enemy: trusting in the defence of Him who had heard and punished the blasphemies of Sennacherib. Not doubting that he would maintain their cause against the impious Nicanor. When the two armies met, the Syrian commander was slain in the first onset; and his host, seized with a panic terror, fled in all directions.

Judas pursued them, and causing an alarm to be sounded, drew all the men out of the several cities they passed, to assist him. By this means the whole Syrian army, consisting of thirty-five thousand men, fell into the hands of the Jews; not one of them escaping to carry the news of their defeat to Antioch. Judas and his men, on their return to the field of battle, found the body of Nicanor; and having cut off his head and the hand he had so impiously lifted up against the temple, carried them to Jerusalem, and fixed them in a conspicuous situation without the city. This great deliverance was not only celebrated with praise and rejoicing at the time it was effected; but a yearly commemoration of it was enjoined on the thirteenth day of the month Adar. After this victory the Jews had a short respite from the malice of their enemies; and Judas took advantage of the leisure it afforded him to dispatch an embassy to solicit the aid and protection of the Romans against the oppressive tyranny of the Syrian kings. It would be difficult to account for the conduct of Judas in this particular, were we not acquainted with the deceitfulness of the human heart; and the weakness of the most pious and confiding servants of God, when left to themselves. Judas, like Hezekiah, had experienced the wonderful power and faithfulness of God towards those who trust in him; yet in a faithless moment he casts away his hitherto unshaken confidence, and seeks protection from an arm of flesh. We must not, however, hastily condemn him; but rather regard the undeviating tenor of his previous conduct, and conclude that, like Hezekiah, he was left to himself on one occasion, that he might become more intimately acquainted with his own heart.*

* 2 Chronicles xxxii. 31.

The Jewish embassy was honourably received at Rome, a treaty of alliance offensive and defensive was made, and the senate wrote to Demetrius desiring him to desist from any farther vexation of the Jews, who were now become the friends and allies of the Roman people. Judas however did not live long enough to learn the event of his application; for before the return of his ambassadors he was slain in battle. When Demetrius heard of the defeat and death of Nicanor, he sent Bacchides with the flower of his army into Judea. Three thousand men only were with Judas, most of whom, fearing the enemy, withdrew from him; so that his whole force was reduced to eight hundred. With these, however, he determined to engage the enemy; though they endeavoured to deter him from so bold a measure. He expressed his confidence in God's power to save by their means; and his entire resignation to the divine will, if deliverance were not vouchsafed by them; or if this were the time appointed for their death. The army of the Syrians consisted of twenty-two thousand men, but notwithstanding the disparity of numbers, Judas and his little band gained an advantage over the right wing, commanded by Bacchides, whom they put to flight, and pursued to a considerable distance. But the left wing of the Syrians following in their rear, they were surrounded, and such as could not escape by flight were killed; among whom was their heroic leader. When the death of Judas was made known, it caused great lamentations throughout Israel. His brothers Simon and Jonathan buried him in the sepulchre of his family at Modin; and a mourning was observed many days by the people in testimony of their poignant grief for his loss. It is not necessary for me to say much on the

character of Judas Maccabeus, since it has appeared so conspicuously in his conduct. Patriotism and valour, founded in pious zeal and confidence, mark every event recorded of him; except in that solitary instance to which I have adverted. It is gratifying to behold the revival of his faith under circumstances of peculiar discouragement, from the desertion of many who forsook him, and the backwardness of those who remained with him: as we may enjoy the comfortable reflection that he was removed in mercy, and made a partaker of the blessings reserved for those who "obtained a good report through faith."

There is one part of his conduct however on which I am desirous of fixing your attention for a while, because the remarks I wish to offer may help to form your judgment on similar occurrences related in scripture. In the battles Judas fought, and in the cities he took and destroyed, we are constantly told that he put all the men to death. In the present age, such a mode of warfare would be deemed sanguinary, and could not certainly consist with Christian principles of benevolence and mercy. But we must learn to discriminate between the vengeful retaliation of man towards man, and the retributive justice of God. The idolatrous nations, as such, were under a sentence of condemnation; and the captains of the Lord's inheritance were the instruments by whom that sentence was executed against them, when the measure of their iniquity was full. Saul was commanded to go and *utterly destroy* the sinners the Amalekites. We know who gave the command, and what were the effects of Saul's setting up his own judgment in the execution of it. Let us then beware of incurring the same guilt by setting up our reason to

account for the dealings of the Almighty. Let us rather consider how dreadful the nature of sin must be, since it requires such visitations. Let us adore that gracious Saviour by whom we may be delivered: ever humbly remembering that "it is of the Lord's mercies we are not consumed" also.

LETTER XXXVII.

THE death of Judas was soon found to be a serious calamity to the people of Israel; for the apostates and other evil-minded persons availed themselves of the confusion that ensued to create disturbances in all parts of the country. The nation was visited by a famine also, at this time; and the party of Alcimus, getting the disposal of the provisions, brought the people under their power. When the supreme authority was in such hands, it is not surprising that wicked men were exalted to offices of trust and power. These every where sought for the friends and adherents of the Maccabeans to put them to death, under the sanction of Bacchides: so that the affliction of the people was greater than it had been since their return from Babylon. In this distress of the nation all who adhered to the cause of God, and sought the welfare of their brethren, repaired to Jonathan, and appointed him their captain, to lead them forth as Judas had done. Bacchides hearing that Jonathan was collecting forces, endeavoured to get him into his power; but the latter with Simon his brother, and a band of valiant followers escaped to the wilderness of Tekoa, and there encamped near the Jordan in

a place which was scarcely accessible to the enemy. For the better securing of their moveable property they sent it under the care of their younger brother John, to their friends the Nabathean Arabs; but a party of Jambrians, another tribe of Arabs, falling in with the convoy, killed the guards, and seized the carriages. Jonathan and Simon not long after found means to avenge the death of their brother, by attacking a party of Jambrians during a nuptial procession; and indemnified themselves for the loss of their goods, by the rich spoils they took on this occasion. Bacchides having discovered Jonathan's camp, and made himself master of the pass which led to it, assaulted the Jews on the sabbath; expecting to overcome them without difficulty, as he understood they would not defend themselves on that day. Jonathan, however, reminded his men of the provisional decree made by his father Mattathias; and exhorted them to seek the assistance of God by prayer, and to fight in their own defence. This they did so valiantly, that a thousand of their enemies were slain; but as they feared to be at last overpowered by numbers, they cast themselves into the river and swam over to the opposite bank, whither the assailants did not think proper to follow them. Bacchides, on his return to Jerusalem, gave orders for repairing all the fortresses of Judea; in which he placed strong garrisons. He also rebuilt the fort of Acra at Jerusalem; and not only furnished it with men, arms, and provisions, but placed in it some of the children belonging to the nobles of Judea, as hostages for the fidelity of their fathers. In the meantime Alcimus, being fully established in the office of high priest by the assistance of Bacchides, began to introduce many innovations in favour of the

athens ; in order to bring the Jewish rites to a nearer conformity with theirs. But his impious attempts were effectually checked by the fiat of Omnipotence ; for as he was giving orders for pulling down the wall of separation, beyond which it was not lawful for the Gentiles to pass, he was seized with a palsy, which deprived him of utterance immediately, and soon after put an end to his life. On the death of Alcimus, for whose sake Bacchides had been sent to Judea, the latter withdrew his forces and returned to the king. It is probable that Demetrius had by this time received such intimations from the Roman Senate respecting the Jews, as induced him to recal his forces, and leave them unmolested.

After the departure of the Syrians Jonathan, being left two years in peace, began to restore the decayed state of his country. This excited the envy of the factious opponents, who concerted a plan for cutting him off, with all his adherents, while they lived in unsuspecting security among them. Not daring however to attempt this by themselves, they invited Bacchides to come and support them in it. But before he arrived the conspiracy was discovered by Jonathan, who having put fifty of the ringleaders to death, retired to Bethbasi, a fortress in the wilderness ; as he did not think himself strong enough to encounter Bacchides in the field. The Syrian army in the meantime entered Judea, and their leader, calling upon the factious Jews to join him, proceeded to besiege Bethbasi. On his approach, Jonathan with part of his forces quitted the fortress ; leaving Simon to defend it with the rest. When the Syrians sat down before the place, Jonathan harassed them from without, cutting off their supplies, falling upon

their foraging parties, and frequently attacking the besiegers themselves. In the meantime Simon defended the place as nobly from within, seizing the opportunities of Jonathan's approach, to sally out, and burn the engines of war. This system of defence was so vexatious to Bacchides, that he not only became weary of the war, but so angry with those who had brought him into it, that he put several of them to death; and determined to raise the siege. Jonathan being informed of this sent to him proposals of accommodation, which he gladly accepted; declaring he would not seek to injure the Jews any more. After this the prisoners on both sides were liberated; and the Syrians returned home. Peace being thus restored, and the authority of Jonathan fully established, he settled at Micmash, and laboured to secure the welfare of the people by a steady enforcement of the law of God. In the eighth year of Jonathan's government Demetrius, being threatened with the loss of his kingdom, by the claims of Alexander Balas, was desirous of making the Jews his friends; and accordingly sent a letter to Jonathan appointing him his general in the land of Judea; with power to raise forces, and arm them for his assistance. The king also commanded that the hostages detained in the fortress of Acra should be given up. Jonathan, on the receipt of this letter, went up to Jerusalem; and by virtue of it, demanded the hostages, whom he restored to their parents. This restraint being removed, many declared for him; and he was enabled to raise such a force that the garrisons left by Bacchides, being afraid of him, abandoned their posts; with the exception of those at Jerusalem and Bethsura: which, being chiefly composed of apostate Jews, had no resource but a desperate resist-

ance. Jonathan, now leaving Micmash, settled at Jerusalem, where he rebuilt the fortifications of the sanctuary; and repaired the city on all sides. When Alexander Balas heard of the offers made to Jonathan by Demetrius, he also sent proposals of alliance; constituting him high priest of the Jews, and presenting him a crown of gold and a purple robe in token of the princely dignity with which he desired to invest him. Demetrius on the other hand, fearing to lose the support of Jonathan, went far beyond his rival in the promises he made; but the Jews recollecting his former cruel treatment of them, and considering his present conduct as nothing more than the effect of his critical circumstances, declared in favour of Alexander. At the feast of tabernacles which happened about this time, Jonathan, with the consent of the people, put on the pontifical robe, and officiated as high priest. He was descended from Joarib, and was probably on that account entitled to the holy office, which had now been vacant seven years from the death of Alcimus. In the contest for the crown of Syria, Demetrius at first gained some advantages; but Alexander having very powerful allies in the kings of Egypt, Cappadocia, and Pergamus, besides the support of the Romans and of Jonathan, was still able to keep the field. Demetrius finding such a formidable enemy to encounter, sent his two sons with a considerable treasure to Cnidus; and then resolved to bring all his forces together and try the issue of another battle. In the beginning of the engagement his left wing defeated the right of the enemy; but while they too ardently followed up this advantage their right wing was overpowered and their king slain.

By this victory Alexander gained possession of the

Syrian empire; and in order to establish himself the more firmly in it, he sent to demand Cleopatra daughter of Ptolemy king of Egypt, in marriage. The latter consenting to his demand, brought the princess to Ptolemais; where the nuptials were solemnized with great splendour. Jonathan was invited on this occasion, and treated with distinguished marks of favour by both the kings. Some of his old enemies, the apostate Jews, more enraged than ever, sought to prefer accusations against him; but the king would hear none of them: and even caused a proclamation to be issued, that no one should presume to speak ill of him. About this time Onias, who had fled into Egypt, when Alcimus was raised to the priesthood, and who had there made his services very acceptable to the king, obtained a grant from him to build a temple like that at Jerusalem. He had no great difficulty in persuading Ptolemy that his revenue would be increased and his authority over the Jews strengthened by preventing their frequent journeys to Jerusalem; but he did not find it so easy to bring those of his own nation to a conformity with his views; since they considered it sinful to offer sacrifices any where else. To satisfy them on this subject, he wrested a passage of the prophet Isaiah,* which refers to the Gospel kingdom; and explained it so as to serve his purpose. Having thus obtained the consent of the Jews in Egypt, he erected a temple in the prefecture of Heliopolis, of which he was governor; and where he had built a city called after his own name, Onion. In this temple, which nearly resembled that at Jerusalem, though it was somewhat smaller, he established a form of worship corresponding in all respects with the rites of the Jewish Church; and hav-

* Isaiah xix. 18—21.

ing obtained a grant of the high priesthood for himself and his descendants, he ordained priests and Levites to officiate therein continually.* When Alexander Balas had fully established himself in the Syrian kingdom, he gave way to sloth and luxury; totally neglecting the affairs of government, which were managed by one of his favourites named Ammonius. The cruel tyranny of this man caused great discontent throughout the kingdom; which being known to Demetrius, son of the late king, he hired a band of Cretan soldiers; and landed with them in Cilicia; where so many joined him, that he soon got possession of that country. Alexander, roused by this invasion, prepared to repel it; and hearing that Apollonius, governor of Cœlo-Syria and Phœnicia had declared for Demetrius, he solicited the aid of his father-in-law Ptolemy king of Egypt. Jonathan still preserving his fidelity to Alexander, was challenged proudly by Apollonius, who had collected a large force at Jamnia. He was not long in accepting the challenge; for marching out of Jerusalem with ten thousand men, he took the city of Joppa; and after that engaging Apollonius in the open field, defeated him. The vanquished general fled to Azotus,† whither Jonathan pursued him; and having taken the place, set fire to it, and consumed the temple of Dagon, in which many of the fugitives had sought refuge. He then proceeded to several other cities, treating all who resisted him in the same manner; and having thus reduced the rebels, he returned with great spoils to Jerusalem. When Alexander heard of these victories obtained on his behalf, he sent Jonathan

* This temple was destroyed by order of Vespasian, soon after the destruction of that at Jerusalem; and about 224 years from the time of its erection.

† Formerly Ashdod.

a buckle of gold like those worn by the royal family; and bestowed on him the city of Ekron with the lands belonging to it. Ptolemy Philometor, arriving with a large army to assist Alexander, was met at Joppa by Jonathan, who attended him to Ptolemais. Here the king of Egypt, having discovered a plot against his life, demanded that the author of it should be given up to him. This was no other than Ammonius, who suspecting that Ptolemy came to seize the kingdom of Syria for himself, determined to cut him off. When Alexander refused to give up his minister, Ptolemy concluded that he knew and approved the treachery; therefore taking away his daughter, he gave her to Demetrius, and assisted him to gain the kingdom. Alexander being vanquished in battle, fled to Arabia, where he was treacherously slain; and Ptolemy did not long survive: for a dangerous wound he had received in the engagement carried him off in a few days.

This year was distinguished by the destruction of Corinth and Carthage. In that of the former the last ray of Grecian power was extinguished; and by that of the latter, Rome was left without a rival, to *subdue all things* and to *break in pieces and bruise*, till she should establish that dominion predicted by Daniel, as the kingdom that should be *strong as iron*.

LETTER XXXVIII.

ON the death of Alexander Balas, Demetrius took possession of Syria without farther opposition; and assumed the surname of Nicator (the conqueror); but the misconduct of his favourite, Lasthenes, to whom he intrusted

the government, added to his own cruelty, rashness, and folly, soon alienated his subjects, and drove them into rebellion against him. Jonathan, in the meantime, being left unmolested in his government, endeavoured to reduce the fortress of Acra, which still remained as a source of annoyance to the people. The garrison sent a complaint to Demetrius, who coming to Ptolemais cited Jonathan thither to answer the accusation. The latter, giving orders to continue the siege, went to the king; by whom he was not only exculpated, but treated with favour and distinction: being confirmed in the office of high priest, and enrolled on the list of the king's friends. By his request also Demetrius remitted all the tribute and customs which had been imposed by the Syrian princes; and made a grant of territory to be added to Judea, on condition of Jonathan's paying three hundred talents. The disaffection of the Syrians towards Demetrius was no sooner perceived by Tryphon, an officer of the late king, than he determined to avail himself of it for the promotion of his own ambitious views. He therefore went into Arabia to Zabdiel a prince of that country, to whom Alexander Balas had committed his infant son; and desired to have the young prince given up to him, that he might place him on the throne of his father. Zabdiel was not at first willing to comply with this proposal; but Tryphon continuing to urge it a long time, gained his point at last; and brought the prince, named Antiochus, into Syria. Jonathan, on his return to Jerusalem, still went on with the siege of Acra; but as he could not succeed in reducing the garrison, he sent an embassy to the king, begging him to withdraw it. The people of Antioch at this time were manifesting their discontent by tumults

and sedition. Demetrius therefore required Jonathan to send him a body of soldiers, to assist him against them : promising to comply with all his demands, in return for this favour. But when by their assistance he had brought under the revolt, he broke all his conditions with Jonathan, and even went so far as to demand the tribute ; in lieu of which three hundred talents had been paid to him. It was at this juncture that Tryphon claimed the kingdom for Antiochus ; and he was not long in obtaining it : for such numbers flocked to his standard, that he was soon in a condition to take the field against Demetrius. In a battle which ensued, the latter was defeated ; and Tryphon marching to Antioch, took the city, and placed Antiochus on the throne. When this was done, Tryphon sent an embassy in the young king's name, to Jonathan, confirming all the privileges Demetrius had rescinded, and adding others to them. He also constituted Simon commander of the king's forces, from the Ladder of Tyre,* to the confines of Egypt, on condition that the brothers would declare for him. Jonathan had too just cause of complaint against Demetrius to refuse these overtures ; and having complied with what was required, a commission was sent him to raise forces in the king's name. When he had collected a considerable army, he marched into the southern part of Judea, where Ascalon submitted to him ; and Gaza, after a brief siege, was forced to surrender. After this he marched northward as far as Damascus, in order to secure all the cities in Coelo-Syria for Antiochus. While Jonathan was thus engaged, the forces of Demetrius in those parts assembled to invade Galilee, probably intending to gain a footing there,

* A mountain near the sea ; between Tyre and Ptolemais.

and intercept him on his return. But Jonathan marched against them, and was finally victorious: though on his first coming thither, he fell into an ambush, and was deserted by most of his men, who fled in terror. A few of the most valiant, however, making a resolute stand, gave the rest time to rally; and the enemies were put to flight, with the loss of three thousand men. Simon in the meantime was not idle: he laid siege to Bethsura and succeeded in taking it, and driving out the garrison, which had been so vexatious to the neighbourhood, during sixteen years. On Jonathan's return to Judea he dispatched ambassadors to Rome, to renew the alliance which Judas had made with that nation. They were honourably received by the senate, who granted all they desired; and dismissed them with letters of safe conduct to the Roman governors through whose provinces they were to pass, in their way to Judea. These ambassadors were also commissioned to visit Lacedæmon, and to take a letter from Jonathan in answer to one formerly written by the king or people of that country to the Jews, with whom they claimed kindred; as being descended from Abraham. The letter alluded to was written to Onias the son of Simon the Just. But how the Lacedæmonians proved their descent from Abraham, is not known; as there are no writings now extant in which it can be traced. Jonathan in thus desiring foreign alliances fell into the same error as Judas had done: it must however be allowed that he did not ask assistance from them; for he declared that the Jews were helped from heaven: but the law of God forbade his people to make alliances with heathen nations on any account. And the word of God, by his prophet,*

* Jeremiah xvii. 5, 7.

pronounced a blessing on those who trust in the Lord, and make his power and goodness the *sole* ground of their hope. The Syrian captains whom Jonathan had defeated in Galilee, having obtained large reinforcements, came again towards that country. Jonathan, however, without loss of time, advanced to meet them as far as Hamath, where he encamped. Having learned that their intention was to surprise him in the night, he used such vigilance that they were not only frustrated, but so completely discouraged, that returning to their camp and making fires, as if for use, they withdrew privately; and before Jonathan was aware of their departure, escaped so far, that it was in vain to pursue them. While he was in the neighbourhood of Coelo-Syria, he again marched to Damascus to promote the interest of Antiochus, and suppress all who opposed it; and having done this, he returned to Judea. Simon in the meantime had been very successful against the Philistines, whom he had subdued at Ascalon and other places. He had also taken possession of Joppa, and secured it by a strong garrison. When the two brothers met at Jerusalem, they called a council to deliberate on the best means of repairing and fortifying the city; and it being determined that every thing needful should be done, the people were called to the work, of which Jonathan took the superintendence. Among other things it was agreed that a wall or mount should be raised against the fortress of Acra, to cut off all communication between the garrison and the city. While these works were going on at Jerusalem, Simon went out into the country; and carried on similar operations in all places that required to be rebuilt or fortified; by which means all the land was rendered secure against

the sudden invasion of their enemies. By this time Tryphon, having obtained the kingdom of Syria ostensibly in behalf of Antiochus, considered himself in a condition to seize it on his own account. But knowing from the character of Jonathan, that his consent would never be gained to so iniquitous a measure, he determined to get him into his power, and put him to death. With this view he marched towards Judea with a powerful army; but when he reached Bethsan, Jonathan met him at the head of forty thousand men. The crafty traitor afraid to encounter him openly, while under such a guard, sought to deceive him with offers of amity: telling him that he came expressly to put him in possession of Ptolemais. Jonathan too easily fell into the snare; for yielding to the persuasion of Tryphon he sent back all his forces except three thousand men. Two thousand of these he left in Galilee, and went with the remainder to Ptolemais, expecting to have the place given up to him. But Tryphon had no sooner got him within the walls, than, causing the gates to be shut, he made him his prisoner; and put his attendants to death. When this was done Tryphon sent out a force to attack the troops that had been sent to Galilee; but these being informed of what had passed, put themselves in such a menacing posture of defence, that the enemy durst not attack them, and they escaped in safety to Jerusalem. When the captivity of Jonathan was made known, it caused great lamentation among the Jews; and no less exultation to their heathen neighbours, who immediately leagued together for their destruction. Tryphon also assembled his forces for the same purpose; hoping to avail himself of the consternation which prevailed among the people for the loss of their leader. The Jews

thus threatened on all sides, were greatly discouraged ; but they were not forsaken of God. He still vouchsafed them a deliverer in the person of Simon, who, calling an assembly of the people, in the temple, offered to lead them forth in the glorious cause to which his father and brothers had devoted themselves ; and in defence of which they had yielded their lives. The people, re-animating by this offer, answered with a voice of general acclamation, "Thou shalt be our leader instead of Jonathan thy brother. Fight thou our battles ; and whatsoever thou commandest us, that will we do." Simon's first care was to complete the fortifications of Jerusalem, which Jonathan had begun ; and to secure Joppa, by sending one of his captains with a strong detachment to that place. Tryphon, in the meantime, marching from Ptolemais, advanced towards Judea ; but when Simon went forth with his army against him, he would not risk an engagement : knowing the prowess of the latter ; and fearing the resolute valour of the Jews, which he had now inflamed by his treachery towards Jonathan. He therefore sent an artful message to Simon, telling him that Jonathan was detained on account of a hundred talents due from him to the king ; but if that sum were paid, and two of his sons sent as hostages for his future good conduct, he should be set at liberty. Simon readily perceived the craft of his adversary ; yet as he could not bear the imputation that would rest on him, in case of refusal, he complied with the demand. Tryphon however still retained Jonathan in his power ; and only withdrew his forces at that time, that he might augment their number, and surprise some part of the country from which Simon was absent. With this intent he soon after entered Judea on the south, by the

way of Idumea ; but Simon who had narrowly watched all his movements, was there also to counteract them. The wall built against the garrison of Acra, had by this time produced the effect for which Jonathan had erected it : for they were reduced to such distress for want of provisions, that they sent to Tryphon begging him to relieve them. He accordingly ordered out all his cavalry by night for that purpose ; but they had not proceeded far when a heavy fall of snow not only obliged them to return, but compelled Tryphon to break up his camp on the following morning, and lead his troops into winter quarters.

LETTER XXXIX.

TRYPHON on his retreat passing through Gilead, put Jonathan to death, near a place called Bascama. When the news of this sad event reached Judea, great lamentations were made ; and Simon sending for his remains, buried them at Modin, where he erected a monument of white marble beautifully carved and polished. Near this he set up seven pyramids to be memorials of his parents, his brothers, and himself ; and then surrounded them and the monument with a range of stately pillars, carved with martial devices. The whole being on an eminence, was seen at a great distance ; and served as a landmark to mariners who frequented the coast.*

When Tryphon returned to Antioch, he deemed it no longer needful to delay his treasonable purposes ; there-

* This monument was perfect in the time of Josephus, who speaks of it with admiration ; and it was still in being two hundred years after his time, according to Eusebius.

fore causing the young king to be put to death secretly, he seized the crown, and declared himself king of Syria. Simon, after the departure of Tryphon, being at rest, sent an embassy to the Romans, informing them of his brother's death; and desiring to renew, in his own name, the alliance made with them. This embassy met with an honourable reception both at Rome and at Sparta; and brought back a renewal of the league, which was publicly read at Jerusalem. Some of the Syrian governors who still favoured Demetrius, collecting their troops, engaged the forces of Tryphon near Ptolemais. The latter party gained the victory; but returning from the pursuit of their enemies, a sudden influx of the sea overflowed and drowned great numbers of them. Demetrius during all this time had remained in luxurious idleness at Laodicea; without making any exertion for the recovery of his dominions. Simon, however, who did not think proper to acknowledge Tryphon, sent ambassadors to make terms of peace and alliance with Demetrius; and obtained from him a confirmation of all his former grants, with the sovereignty of Judea, provided he would aid him against the usurper. The Jews rejoiced greatly in this release from a foreign yoke; and from this time dated all their contracts by the era of their own prince, instead of that of the kings of Syria. Simon, in his quality of prince, now made a progress through the land, to provide for its safety by fortifications wherever needful; especially at Bethsura and Joppa. He also besieged and took Gazara, which had revolted on the death of Jonathan; and having expelled the heathen from thence, peopled it entirely with Jews. Finding his son John very valiant, he made him commander of all the forces in Judea, and

appointed his residence in this city as a place of importance, where his presence would be needful. But the greatest advantage gained for the people at this time was the reduction of the garrison at Acra. The failure of Tryphon's attempt on their behalf had been attended with fatal consequences to them; for they were so destitute of provisions that a great number of them perished through famine, and the rest were glad to surrender on condition of having their lives spared. The day of their departure was celebrated by the Jews with public thanksgiving and rejoicings, which were appointed to be renewed annually in remembrance of it. Simon, however, did not think it enough to gain possession of this fortress; for by reminding the people of the evils they had suffered from it, and representing the danger of its falling again into the power of their enemies, he prevailed on them not only to demolish the building, but to level the eminence on which it stood; that the sanctuary might no more be exposed to insult from that quarter. This work was completed in three years, during which Simon strengthened the mountain of the temple, and built habitations for himself and his company within the fortifications. So many blessings conferred on the nation, by the instrumentality of Simon, rendered him very dear to the Jews; and in a public assembly at Jerusalem, after the recital of his noble exploits, and the benefits enjoyed under his government, the dignities of high priest and prince, which had been granted by Demetrius, were solemnly confirmed to him and his descendants.

The author of the first Book of Maccabees has left us a pleasing picture of the prosperity enjoyed by the Jews at this time; and has also declared the means by which

Simon procured it for them : telling us that he searched out the law of God ; and suffered no neglect or contempt of it to pass unproved or unpunished. In the account of Simon's inauguration there is a circumstance I wish you to observe. The priesthood and dominion were confirmed to him, "*till there should arise a faithful prophet.*" By this it would seem not only that the Messiah was expected to appear as the prophet foretold by Moses ;* but that an opinion then prevailed that he would abolish the Levitical priesthood, and introduce a new mode of worship. The decree made at this time in favour of Simon, was ordered to be engraved on a table of brass, and hung up in the sanctuary ; and copies of it were placed in the treasury of the temple, for the use of Simon and his sons. While these events were passing at Jerusalem, Tryphon still retained that part of the Syrian dominions he had usurped ; and the Parthians took possession of all the rest. The subjects of Demetrius, not liking the tyranny of their new masters, sent repeated invitations to him ; promising to revolt in his favour, if he would come among them. Being at length roused to exertion, he passed over the Euphrates to their assistance : leaving Tryphon at rest for the present, because he expected to overcome him by the help of his other subjects ; when he had recovered them from the Parthians. On his appearance in the east the Elymæans, Persians, and Bactrians, declared for him, and by their means he gained several victories over the Parthians ; but he was afterwards drawn into a snare by them under pretence of making peace ; and his army being destroyed, he was made prisoner. His queen Cleopatra hearing of his captivity shut herself

* Deuteronomy xviii. 15—19.

p in Seleucia on the Orontes, where many of Tryphon's oldiers resorted to her; because the tyranny of that usurper was become insufferable to them. Fearing however that the people of Seleucia would give her up to Tryphon, rather than endure a siege, she sent for Antiochus Sidetes her husband's brother, and offered him the crown of Syria on condition of his uniting with her to expel the tyrant. Antiochus immediately took the title of king, and in that quality wrote a letter to Simon; telling him that he was coming against Tryphon. To secure the Jews in his interest he made many grants to Simon, with promises of great honours and immunities to himself, the temple, and the people; when he should have overcome the usurper. Early in the following year, Antiochus landing in Syria with a large army of mercenaries, and being joined by the forces of Cleopatra, with many deserters from Tryphon, the latter, unable to keep the field against him, fled first to Dora, and afterwards to Apamea, where he was taken and put to death. When Antiochus had thus gained the kingdom, he was so far from regarding his promises to Simon, that he only sought an occasion to quarrel with him; therefore sending one of his officers to Jerusalem, he demanded the restoration of Gazara, Joppa, and other places, with the fortress of Acra in Jerusalem; or five hundred talents instead of them. Simon replied that he had no objection to pay a hundred talents for Joppa and Gazara; but the other places being his by right of inheritance, he would keep possession of them now that he had obtained it. The king was very much displeased at this answer, and sent one of his captains named Cendebeus to invade Judea; but Simon dispatched a large force under his sons Judas

and John, who defeated the Syrians, and drove them out of the country. After this the Jews were left to the enjoyment of peace and prosperity about two years; when both were suddenly interrupted by the death of Simon. He was accustomed to make frequently a progress through the cities of Judea, to settle all matters concerning them. On one of these occasions he came to Jericho, with his sons Judas and Mattathias. Ptolemy, the son of Abubus, who had married one of his daughters, being governor of the place, invited them to his castle to partake of an entertainment. But his design was only to get them into his power, that he might put them to death; and seize the government of Judea for himself. He therefore caused them to be assassinated while sitting at table; and then dispatched a party to Gazara where John resided, in order to cut him off also. But John having received notice of their coming, as well as of what had passed at Jericho, fell upon them as they approached, and put them all to death. After this he hastened to Jerusalem to secure that place against the traitor; and there being declared high priest and prince of the Jews, as the successor of his father, he took such measures as were likely to ensure the safety of his people. Ptolemy, who had formed all his plans in concert with Antiochus, seeing they were likely to fail through the prudence and firmness of John, had no resource but that of calling in the Syrians to assist him. In the meantime, however, he was obliged to flee to Philadelphia, and it is not known what became of him afterwards. Simon was the last of the five sons of Mattathias, all of whom were distinguished by their courageous zeal and devotion to the cause of God and their country. He was appointed, by

is dying father, to be the counsellor of his brethren; and he was peculiarly fitted for that office by his piety and moderation. In the prosecution of the wars in which he was engaged, he displayed no less ability than in the art of government; and by the account given of him in the first Book of Maccabees, we may conclude that he was an illustrious and excellent person. That part of the Jewish history which is contained in the apocryphal writings, ends at the death of Simon.

LETTER XL.

ANTIOCHUS SIDETES was not slow in accepting the invitation of the traitorous Ptolemy. For thinking this a favourable opportunity for getting possession of Judea, he marched thither with a large army; and having defeated John in battle, shut him up in Jerusalem, and there besieged him with all his forces. The besieged made a vigorous defence, always repulsing the assailants, and frequently sallying forth to destroy their works and engines. But they were reduced to great distress for want of provisions; for the enemy had made two deep ditches round the walls; so that they could neither receive supplies from without, nor send from the city such persons as were useless in the defence of it. This was the state of affairs when John sent to beg a truce, in order to celebrate the feast of tabernacles. Antiochus not only granted his request, but furnished him with beasts and other things needful for the sacrifices to be offered at that time. This considerate behaviour, which evinced the piety and cle-

mency of his opponent, induced John to treat with him for peace; and the king granted it on condition that the besieged should give up their arms, pay tribute for Joppa, and other places held by them out of Judea, and dismantle Jerusalem. A demand was made for the rebuilding of the fortress of Acra; but to this John would not consent, choosing rather to pay the king five hundred talents instead of it. Some of these conditions being immediately complied with, and hostages given for the performance of the rest, the siege was raised, and the Jews were again left in peace. At the time John sued for terms with Antiochus, he and his people were reduced to the last extremity by famine; which being known in the Syrian camp, their enemies urged the king to seize this opportunity of destroying them utterly: representing that they were a hateful people who renounced all communication with other men; neither eating with them, nor worshiping their gods. These arguments were specious, but they did not prevail; because the Jews had an Almighty Protector, who disposed the heart of Antiochus to spare them. As the people of God, and the depositories of his promises, they were not to be extirpated: though as sinners, continually prone to depart from him, they needed frequent chastisement. In the fifth year of John Hyrcanus, the king of Syria made war upon the Parthians, in order to deliver his brother Demetrius from captivity. He had great success in this invasion; for, having defeated the enemy several times, he recovered all the countries formerly governed by his ancestors. The fruits of all these advantages were, however, lost to him by the licentious and oppressive conduct of his troops, who made themselves so hateful to the inhabitants, among whom they

were dispersed in winter quarters, that they conspired with the Parthians to massacre them all on the same day. This design was so fully effected, that scarcely a man was left to relate the catastrophe; and Antiochus was slain among his people, whom he vainly endeavoured to defend. Demetrius had been set at liberty by the king of Parthia, in order that he might become the rival of his brother. By this means he escaped the slaughter, and got back to Syria, where he ascended the vacant throne. The death of Antiochus, and the troubles which ensued in Syria, afforded Hyrcanus an opportunity of freeing himself from all foreign dominion; and greatly enlarging his territories. He took possession of several places in Syria, Phœnicia, and Arabia; and having made himself master of Sechem the chief city of Samaria, he destroyed the temple on Mount Gerizim. After this he invaded Idumea, and having totally subjected the Edomites, he allowed them the alternative of embracing the Jewish religion, or leaving their country. They chose the former, and from that time were incorporated with the Jews as one nation.* In the eighth year of his reign, Hyrcanus sent an embassy to renew the alliance made by his father and uncles with the Romans. On this occasion he represented what had been done against the Jews by Antiochus Sidetes, contrary to the decrees of the Senate issued in the time of Simon. This was all declared to be null and void; the Jews were confirmed in their independence, the Syrians were ordered to make reparation for all the damage they had done, and ambassadors were sent from Rome, to see that the commands of the Senate were in all these respects obeyed. Hyrcanus and his people were so

* See Notes L and M.

much gratified by this behaviour of the Senate, that they sent another embassy, in the following year, to present their thanks, with gifts to the amount of fifty thousand pieces of gold. The Syrian kings, from this time, had no power to molest the Jews; for, independent of the injunctions of the Senate, they were too much harassed by revolts, usurpations, and civil wars, to attempt any thing against their neighbours. Hyrcanus, in the meantime, grew so powerful that he resolved on the reduction of Samaria; and sent his two sons Aristobulus and Antigonus to besiege it. The inhabitants, called to their aid Antiochus Cygicenus, one of the Syrian kings, who brought a large army to relieve them; but he was defeated by the brothers; and narrowly escaped falling into their hands. After this victory, they pressed the siege so vigorously, that the people of Samaria again applied to Antiochus, who, unable to raise a sufficient force himself, sent to Ptolemy Lathyrus king of Egypt, from whom he received six thousand auxiliaries. With these added to his own troops, he made incursions on the Jewish territory; hoping thereby to draw off the brothers from the siege. In this, however, he was disappointed, and finding his army decrease continually, he withdrew to Tripoli: leaving two of his generals to carry on the war. One of them was soon after cut off in a hazardous enterprise; and the other, betraying his trust, gave up Scythopolis and other places to Hyrcanus, for a sum of money. Samaria thus deprived of all succour from without, was obliged to surrender, after a siege of twelve months. Hyrcanus entirely destroyed the city: not only razing it to the ground; but causing trenches to be drawn across the site, to prevent the rebuilding of it. You are not to infer that this was

me out of hatred to the Samaritans; for that people did not dwell in the city since the time of Alexander the Great, who expelled them from it, and settled some of his own followers there. From this time Hyrcanus remained in possession of Judea, Galilee, and Samaria, without opposition from any foreign power. He was one of the most distinguished persons of the age in which he lived: not only by the extent and prosperity of his dominions, but by the wisdom and mildness of his government. In the latter part of his life, however, he was troubled by divisions among his own people. Two revailing sects the Pharisees and Sadducees now began to render themselves conspicuous by mutual opposition.*

Hyrcanus had been brought up in the principles of the former; and had therefore distinguished them by particular marks of favour. Being desirous to receive the testimony of their approbation, he invited the chief men among them to an entertainment; and having declared that his desire had always been to act with justice towards men, and to do every thing pleasing in the sight of God, according to the doctrines taught by the Pharisees, he begged them to point out any deviations he had made from this rule; that he might rectify them. All were unanimous in declaring that his conduct had always been consistent with piety and justice, except one man named Eleazar, who called upon him to relinquish the office of high priest, which he was incapable of holding, because his mother had been a slave. Hyrcanus greatly displeased at this false imputation, demanded of the Pharisees what punishment was due to Eleazar, for thus defaming the high priest and prince of his people. They treated the matter very

* See Note N.

lightly, and thereby gave so much countenance to the calumny, that Hyrcanus from that time withdrew his favour entirely from them, annulled their traditions by penal enactments, and renounced their party for that of the Sadducees. You must not however suppose that the opinions of this sect were the same as in the time of our Lord's sojourn upon earth :* for it is not likely that Hyrcanus, who was a pious man, would have embraced doctrines so contrary to the declarations of the sacred scriptures.

Hyrcanus died the year after this rupture, having been high priest and prince of the Jews twenty-nine years. The nation enjoyed greater prosperity under his government than it had done at any period since the captivity ; and he ruled over a greater extent of territory than any Jewish prince after Solomon. His character stands very high as a prince and a warrior ; and that he was, as he declared, desirous of doing the will of God, may be inferred from the blessings which attended his reign : for under the Mosaic dispensation, temporal prosperity was promised to those who faithfully observed the laws and ordinances enjoined in the word of God.

Hyrcanus was the last high priest who in any way sought the glory of God. After his time ambition, tyranny, and cruelty characterised the rulers of the Jewish nation. While, as might be expected, impiety, rebellion, and discord unceasingly proclaimed the degeneracy of the people.

* Matthew xxii. 23. Acts xxiii. 8.

LETTER XLI.

HYRCANUS at his death left five sons, the eldest of whom, named Aristobulus, succeeded him both as high priest and supreme governor. He was not however content with the power of monarchy, but thought proper to place a crown upon his head, and assume the title of king. The conduct of this prince soon proved him to be of a character totally different to that of his father; for he was no sooner settled in the government, than he put his mother to death; because she claimed a right to the temporal sovereignty, by virtue of Hyrcanus's will; and shut up three of his brothers in prison, in order to allay his jealous fears of their attempts against him. The eldest of his brothers, named Antigonus, being his favourite, was allowed a share in the government at first; but the affection of this unnatural tyrant was no guarantee of safety for the future. Aristobulus made war upon the Itureans, who inhabited a part of Cœlo-Syria, adjoining the north-eastern border of the land of Israel; and having subdued most of them, and given them the same choice as Hyrcanus gave the Edomites, they also made a similar decision, and became a part of the Jewish nation. The king, being obliged to leave the army, and return to Jerusalem, on account of his health, left Antigonus to finish the war. In the meantime, the queen and others about Aristobulus, envying the influence his brother had gained, sought to inflame his jealousy against him. At the feast of Tabernacles, Antigonus, having finished the conquest of Iturea, returned in triumph to Jerusalem; where, without taking off his armour, he immediately repaired to the temple, followed

by his guards. The palace being within the fortifications of the sanctuary, near the temple, this entrance of Antigonus with his guards was represented to the king as a proof of his having some design against him. Aristobulus therefore sent to his brother, telling him to take off his armour and come to him; but the messenger, being instructed by the queen and her party, delivered a contrary message. Antigonus, suspecting no harm, hastened to obey the summons, and was killed by the king's guards, who had orders to let him pass if unarmed, but otherwise to destroy him. This dreadful act was no sooner committed, than the king was seized with the most poignant remorse. Conscience reminded him of the murder of his mother, to which he had now added that of Antigonus; and the pangs he suffered increasing his bodily disease, put an end to his life, after he had reigned one year. On the death of Aristobulus, the queen released his three brothers from prison, and Alexander surnamed Jannæus ascended the throne. His eldest surviving brother, whose name is not known, was soon after put to death for making an attempt to supplant him: so that of the five sons of Hyrcanus, two only were left. The youngest, named Absalom, was content to enjoy the favour of his brother in a private station. When Alexander had settled the affairs of his kingdom at home, he led forth an army to besiege Ptolemais. The inhabitants of that city sent to Ptolemy Lathyrus for relief, but before he arrived they changed their mind; for, dreading the displeasure of his mother Cleopatra, who had expelled him from Egypt, they determined to do without his assistance. Ptolemy on the rejection of his services, was at a loss how to act; but he was soon applied to by the people of Gaza, and, by Zoilus prince of Dora, to assist them

against another body of Alexander's troops, who were ravaging their territories. He immediately marched to their relief, in consequence of which Alexander was compelled to raise the siege of Ptolemais, that he might be at hand to watch the movements of this new enemy. Finding himself unequal to cope with Lathyrus in the field, he sought to get the better of him by artifice, under pretence of coming to an agreement with him. But his fraudulent intentions being made known to Lathyrus, the latter broke off all intercourse with him, and determined henceforth to be his enemy. In the following year he accordingly returned to take vengeance both on the people of Ptolemais, and on Alexander; and having appointed one part of his army to act against the former, he led the other division into the territories of the latter. The king of Judea marched out to meet him with an army of fifty thousand men, but he was defeated with the loss of more than half of them; and as he was no longer able to keep the field, Lathyrus ravaged his dominions without mercy. Such was the state of affairs when Cleopatra queen of Egypt fearing that her son would make himself master of Judea, and thereby effect his re-establishment in Egypt, came with a large force into Phœnicia. On the news of her arrival, Lathyrus raised the siege of Ptolemais, and retired into Cœlo-Syria. The queen sent one of her generals in pursuit of him; and then marched to the rescued city, expecting to be admitted. But when she found the gates shut against her, she determined to invest the place and enter it by force. In the meantime Lathyrus having escaped the pursuit of her troops, had marched with all his forces into Egypt; hoping to regain the kingdom during her absence. In this however he was

disappointed; for the troops she had left behind, being joined by a reinforcement she sent them, made such a determined resistance, that he was repulsed, and obliged to return into Palestine, where he took up his winter quarters. Cleopatra still carrying on the siege of Ptolemais, at length succeeded in taking it. On this occasion Alexander waited on her there with many valuable presents; and she received him with distinguished marks of favour: chiefly on account of his enmity to Lathyrus. Some of her ministers, however, urged her to seize the person of Alexander, and thus make herself mistress of Judea. But Ananias a Jew, who was one of her chief favourites, made such representations and expostulations as induced her to reject their counsel, and suffer Alexander to return in safety to Jerusalem. Lathyrus, finding that the opposition of his mother would effectually hinder his success in Palestine, after having passed the winter at Gaza, returned to Cyprus; and the queen, satisfied with having defeated his projects, went back to Egypt. Alexander, when he had recruited his army, undertook the reduction of Gadara, a city on the east of Jordan. This he effected in ten months; and then made himself master of Amathus a very strong fortress in the neighbourhood, where he found a considerable treasure. But Theodorus the owner of it fell upon him as he was returning from his conquests; and not only recovered the spoil, but slew ten thousand of Alexander's men, and took all his baggage. This sudden reverse, although a national calamity, was a subject of triumph to many of the Jews. For ever since Hyrcanus revoked the traditions of the Pharisees, they had been the enemies of his family; and were glad of any opportunity to set the people against them. Notwithstanding

his losses, Alexander secured Raphia and Anthon, which were in the neighbourhood of Gaza; and when he had somewhat retrieved his affairs, laid siege to that city. Apollodotus who commanded there, defended the place with great courage and prudence during a whole year; but the reputation he thus gained excited the jealousy of his brother, who having caused him to be slain, delivered up the city to Alexander. The victor, on his first entrance, assumed an air of moderation and clemency; but when he had taken entire possession of the city, he gave it up to be plundered by his soldiers, in revenge for what the inhabitants had done against him when they called Ptolemy Lathyrus to their aid. This cruelty however recoiled on the agents of it; for the citizens resisting his troops, nearly an equal number fell on both sides. Neither the martial character of Alexander, nor his success could secure him from the contempt of his subjects, who were continually excited against him by the insinuations of the Pharisees. In the eleventh year of his reign, when he was officiating in his office of high priest, at the feast of Tabernacles, the seditious spirit of the people was openly displayed. They treated him with the greatest indignity; not only calling him slave and other opprobrious names, but even pelting him with citrons.

It is shocking to contemplate the degeneracy and impiety of the people and their high priest at this time. For Alexander, instead of recalling them to their duty with the dignified mildness suited to his office, gave way to the vindictive feelings of a warrior; and falling upon the multitude with his soldiers, slew six thousand of them. This, however, was but the commencement of civil discord, the consequences of which

extended beyond the present reign. Alexander, no longer daring to trust himself to his own people, called in foreign mercenaries for his guards; of whom he always kept six thousand about him. These disturbances at home did not however prevent his expeditions abroad; for as soon as they were in some measure appeased, he led his forces against the Arabians; and gained considerable advantages over them. Then turning his arms against Moab and Gilead, he made those countries tributary to him. In the following year he made another attempt on the fortress of Amathus which he had formerly taken from Theodorus, but which the latter had recovered, with the treasure taken from it. The fame of Alexander's exploits now made such an impression on him, that removing his treasure, and withdrawing his garrison, he left the fortress, which Alexander immediately demolished.

Alexander's next campaign was calamitous both in its events and consequences. For while engaged in a war against Obodas an Arabian king, who governed in Gaulonitis, he was drawn into an ambush, and lost the greater part of his army. On his return to Jerusalem the people rose in rebellion against him; thinking to profit by the weak state to which he was reduced. But as he wanted neither courage nor conduct, he soon raised a force sufficient to oppose them; and a civil war ensued, which during six years was carried on with the utmost animosity on both sides. Alexander indeed got the better of them in all the engagements that took place; but such was their rage against him that no losses could repress their efforts, nor any severities induce submission. For when he became weary of destroying and punishing them, and desired to know on what terms he

should grant them peace, they replied, By cutting his own throat : for that they could have no peace with him while alive ; and it would be well for him if even after his death they were reconciled, after all he had done against them. Nothing remained, therefore, but to continue the war ; and in order to carry it on with more effect, the people called in the king of Syria with a large army to their assistance. In the battle that ensued Alexander was so completely defeated, that he was obliged to take refuge among the mountains. This reverse, however, proved advantageous to him : for the distress to which he was reduced, excited so much compassion among his rebellious subjects, that six thousand of them immediately joined him ; and the king of Syria fearing the desertion of all the rest, withdrew his forces and returned home. His departure enabled Alexander to recover himself and raise new forces to withstand the rebels, whom he could not yet bring to terms of peace. At length he gained a decisive victory over them ; and having shut up those that escaped in Bethome, laid siege to the place, which he succeeded in taking some months after. When he had got the rebels in his power he treated eight hundred of them with such extreme cruelty, that all of their party, who could escape, fled the country, and returned not again during his life. Thus ended this dreadful war, in which more than fifty thousand of the factious party were slain. During these civil commotions, many of the places Alexander had formerly taken on the borders of Arabia having revolted from him, he now passed over Jordan, to reduce them. He succeeded in taking Pella, Dia, and Gerasa ; in the last of which he found the treasure Theodorus had removed from Amathus. The inhabitants of Pella

refusing to comply with his terms of embracing the Jewish religion, he destroyed their city and obliged them to quit the country. In the two following years he greatly enlarged his possessions on the east of Jordan : making himself master of Gaulana, Seleucia, and the strong fortress of Gamala ; after which he returned to Jerusalem where he was received with joyful acclamations, on account of these conquests. Being now secure from enemies without, and undisturbed by commotions at home, Alexander resigned himself to luxury and drunkenness. He was not, however, long permitted to disgrace his holy office by these excesses ; for they brought on a quartan ague, which soon put an end to his turbulent and vicious career.

In the last year of his life he undertook another expedition ; hoping by that means to remove or alleviate his disorder. But the exertions he made had a contrary effect, and he died at the siege of Ragaba, a castle on the left of Jordan ; leaving the kingdom to Alexandra his queen during her life, with the power of appointing either of his two sons to succeed at her death. Alexandra who was with her husband at this time, when she found that his life was despaired of, expressed her fears respecting the future welfare of herself and her children. For knowing the bitter enmity of the Pharisees, which though stifled, was not extinct, she dreaded the effects of it, when no longer restrained by the power of Alexander. The dying prince acknowledged the justice of her apprehensions, and instructed her how to avert the impending evil. In the first place he advised her to conceal his death till the castle was taken ; and then to return in triumph to Jerusalem. When this was done, she was to call an assembly of the principal Pharisees ;

and not only to declare herself willing to be governed in all public matters by their counsel, but also to give up the corpse of her husband, to be disposed of according to their will. By these means Alexander assured her she would obtain an honourable burial for him; and secure the future safety of herself and her children. And in this he was not mistaken: for the queen, obeying his injunctions in all respects, gave such satisfaction to the Pharisees, that forgetting their former hatred to Alexander, they solemnized his funeral with great magnificence; and reconciled the people to the remembrance of him by expatiating on his military achievements, which had brought such an accession of power and glory to the nation. It is almost superfluous to offer any remarks on the character of this prince, in whose actions cruelty, revenge, and tyranny were so conspicuous. As the high priest of the Jews, he disgraced his sacred title by a conduct every way opposed to the pure and holy laws of God, and by an unwarrantable ambition. Not leading his people forth to oppose the enemies of the sanctuary, as became the captain of the Lord's inheritance; but making war like a mere temporal prince, to enlarge his dominions, and promote his own glory. Under such a high priest, it is not surprising that impiety and vice made rapid inroads on the nation. For though he did not countenance the traditions by which the Pharisees had corrupted themselves and the people, it is evident that he took no pains, either by his authority or example, to enforce or recommend the law of God, as set forth in the sacred scriptures.

LETTER XLII.

WHEN Alexandra had quietly obtained possession of the government, she made her eldest son Hyrcanus, high priest; and according to her promise committed the management of public affairs to the Pharisees. The first thing they did was to revoke the decree of John Hyrcanus, by which their traditions had been abolished; and having removed this restraint, they went on to inculcate and augment them, till the light of scripture was obscured by them, and the law of God neglected for them. The Pharisees' next object was to strengthen their party by releasing all that had been imprisoned, and recalling such as had been exiled during the civil war. When this was done they proceeded to take revenge on those who had espoused the part of Alexander: putting to death as many of them as they thought fit. The queen was greatly distressed at these proceedings, but she had no power to prevent them; because the Pharisees had the people entirely at their command, by the influence they had obtained over them. And though she had a military force sufficient to keep her neighbours in awe, she had seen too much of the misery incurred by civil war, to attempt any thing by coercive measures. Things went on in this way till the seventh year of her reign; when the oppressed party assembled, and went in a body to the queen, headed by her younger son Aristobulus. They remonstrated against the injustice of suffering them to be persecuted for their fidelity to the late king, and their attachment to the interests of her family; and besought her to put a stop to all

rather proceedings against them; or, if this could not be done; either to grant them permission to leave the country, or disperse them in the garrisons of the kingdom, where they would be secure from the assaults of their enemies. The queen, unable to prevail on the Pharisees to remit their persecutions, and unwilling to lose so many faithful subjects, by permitting them to leave the country, accorded their last demand; and placed them in the garrisons, where they would not only be in a condition to resist their enemies, but also to serve her as faithful friends, in any emergency. In the ninth year of Alexandra, when Tigranes king of Armenia was besieging Ptolemais, she sent an embassy with rich presents to him, desiring his friendship; for he had such a force with him as made her apprehensive for the safety of her dominions. Tigranes accepted her presents, and granted her desire; but her kingdom would not have been more safe on that account, had not other circumstances influenced his conduct. The Romans were at this time making such rapid progress in Pontus and Cappadocia, that he was compelled to leave Syria, and return into Armenia; without thinking of new conquests, till he had ensured the safety of his actual possessions. Not long after this, in the same year, Alexandra fell sick, and died at the age of seventy-three; leaving the kingdom to her eldest son Hyrcanus. His brother Aristobulus, however, who had always determined on seizing the crown at his mother's death, no sooner found that her recovery was hopeless, than he secretly quitted Jerusalem, and repairing to his father's adherents, who were dispersed in the several garrisons, made such interest with them, that twenty-two fortresses were quickly given up to him. When he had thus

strengthened himself, the army was ready to declare for him ; and the people, wearied by the tyranny of the Pharisees, regarded him as their deliverer from oppression : so that his influence was continually augmenting. The Pharisees, greatly disturbed at his progress, repaired with Hyrcanus to the dying queen ; and having informed her of what was passing, begged to know what was to be done. Alexandra replied that she was no longer in a condition to regard such affairs ; therefore must leave the matter to their decision. They decided on supporting Hyrcanus, who favoured their party ; and when, after his mother's death he took possession of the throne, they did all in their power to maintain him in it. When Aristobulus first quitted Jerusalem, they had seized his wife and children as hostages. But this no way deterring him, they raised an army against him, and came to an engagement near Jericho. This encounter was decisive : for most of their troops went over to Aristobulus ; and Hyrcanus, fleeing to Jerusalem, shut himself up in the castle of Baris ; where, finding himself abandoned by most of his subjects, he soon came to terms with his brother ; and agreed to resign both the kingdom and high priesthood to him. Hyrcanus had held these dignities only three months ; and he resigned them the more willingly, as being of an indolent disposition, he preferred a private life under the protection of his brother.

The friends of Hyrcanus however were not so well satisfied with these arrangements, which tended to counteract their schemes of aggrandisement. The chief person among these was Antipater, an Idumean of noble birth ; who, having been educated in the court of Alexander, and the queen his successor, had ingratiated

himself with their eldest son, in the hope of enjoying his favour when he should ascend the throne. All his prospects were at once obscured by the success of Aristobulus, but his artful enterprising spirit did not allow him to relinquish them. For he determined to effect the restoration of Hyrcanus; and for this purpose applied to Aretas, king of Arabia, for an army: at the same time using every method in his power to bring the Jews at home into a compliance with his measures. When Antipater had advanced thus far he had only to obtain the consent of Hyrcanus to the execution of his plan. But this perhaps was the most difficult part of his undertaking: for that prince being of a quiet indolent disposition, had no wish to reign; and would not make any effort to regain his kingdom. At length, however, being persuaded that his life was threatened by Aristobulus, he consented to flee for safety to Aretas; who according to agreement, took him back to Judea with an army of fifty thousand men. These being joined by the Jews of Hyrcanus's party, obtained a victory over Aristobulus; and having obliged him to take refuge in the mountain of the temple, besieged him there. This took place just at the time of the Passover; and the besieged wishing to celebrate that sacred ordinance, applied to their countrymen to furnish them with lambs for sacrifice, which the latter agreeing to, the purchase money was let down from the wall. But the besiegers having got the money, refused to let them have the lambs. Such was the growing impiety of these people, who in this instance might have profited by the example of Antiochus Sidetes, and other heathen commanders. Their vices kept pace also with their impiety: for they were guilty of a most flagrant act of

cruelty at this time. There lived at Jerusalem a man named Onias, who was so much esteemed for sanctity, that his prayers were considered peculiarly efficacious. The army of Hyrcanus having brought him among them, urged him to curse Aristobulus and his party. Onias, who was doubtless a faithful servant of God, resisted their importunities for some time; but being continually urged by them, he lifted up his hands towards heaven, and prayed that God would not hearken to the prayers of one party against the other: since all were his priests or his people. The multitude disappointed and enraged at this truly patriotic prayer, fell upon Onias and stoned him to death. Aristobulus, in the meantime, hearing that a Roman army was come to Damascus, under the command of Scaurus, sent thither to beg his assistance; for which he offered four hundred talents. Hyrcanus made a similar offer; but Scaurus embraced the party of Aristobulus, and sending to Aretas, desired him to withdraw. Gabinus also, receiving three hundred talents, sent him a message to the same effect: both threatening him with war in case of refusal. Aretas thus compelled to raise the siege, marched towards his own country; but Aristobulus, collecting all the forces he could get, pursued him, and routed his army in a general engagement. About this time Pompey coming to Damascus, Aristobulus sent an embassy to court his favour, with a present of a golden vine, worth four hundred talents. But he did not gain any thing by this; for the present was sent to Rome, and received as if from his father, whose name was inscribed on it. In the following year Pompey came again into Cœlo-Syria, when the two brothers sent ambassadors to him; Antipater on the part of Hyrcanus, and Nicodemus on be-

self of Aristobulus, to set forth their respective claims. Pompey heard what they had to say, and then told them that the princes must appear before him in person : promising to examine the grounds of their controversy, and decide it according to justice. He was not however first then at leisure to attend to them ; and shortly after, urgent affairs demanded his presence in Pontus : so that he did not take cognizance of their cause till the next year ; when hearing of the depredations of Aretas, he returned into Syria. On his arrival at Damascus the two brothers appeared, in obedience to his summons : each seeking to make good his cause in opposition to the other. Hyrcanus alleged his right to govern, as being the eldest ; and Aristobulus urged the propriety of retaining the kingdom ; on account of his brother's incapacity, which made him unfit to reign ; and exposed the state to the intrigues of the ambitious and designing. A third party from Jerusalem also addressed Pompey ; begging to have the government invested as formerly, in the hands of the high priest ; that they might not be enslaved by tyrants under the title of kings. Pompey, though he disapproved the conduct of Aristobulus, made no immediate decision, lest that prince should obstruct his proceedings against Aretas. He therefore dismissed the brothers : promising that when his present undertaking should be completed, he would go to Jerusalem, and there settle the difference between them. Aristobulus, however, perceiving the unfavourable disposition of Pompey towards him, hastened from Damascus without taking leave ; and on his arrival in Judea, began to put the country into a state of defence. When Pompey returned from Arabia he was informed of this, and immediately marched into Judea ;

where finding Aristobulus in one of his castles, he sent a messenger to summon him into his presence. Aristobulus, though unwilling to comply, yielded to the persuasion of those about him; and went to Pompey, who, after conversing with him on the question of right between his brother and himself, allowed him to return. Aristobulus made two or three visits to Pompey in this manner; hoping to gain his favour; but at the same time continued to strengthen his castles, and make other preparations for resistance. This being made known to Pompey, he obliged him in one of these visits, to surrender all his castles, and sign orders to the several governors to deliver them up. Aristobulus, greatly incensed at this violence, which he had no power to resist, hastened to Jerusalem, and there prepared for war. He did not however act with his accustomed vigour in the measures he took: being actuated at once by a desire to conciliate Pompey, and a determination to resist him, if he favoured Hyrcanus. When Pompey was informed of his flight, he immediately pursued him; but on his approach to Jerusalem he was met by Aristobulus, who came to offer terms of submission. Pompey accepted his proposals; and advanced to the city, expecting to be admitted. But the gates were shut against him, and he was told from the walls that the agreement made by Aristobulus would not be complied with. The haughty Roman immediately put Aristobulus in chains; and prepared to invest Jerusalem with all his forces. The place being very strong, might have held out a considerable time, but for the divisions that prevailed within it. The adherents of Aristobulus, enraged at the detention of their sovereign, wished to defend the city; while the party of Hyrcanus were for opening the gates. The

latter being the more powerful, gained their point; and the others retiring into the mountain of the temple, determined there to hold out against the enemy. Pompey being received into the city, laid siege to the fortifications of the sanctuary. The priests were mostly favourable to Aristobulus, and were consequently among the besieged. But the people took part with Hyrcanus; and joined him in supplying Pompey with every thing needful for his undertaking. What a dreadful scene is here presented! not only brother striving against brother, and those who were appointed to be ministers of mercy, opposed to the people, and becoming their persecutors; but the sanctuary itself assailed by the heathen, in conjunction with those who still assumed to themselves the name and privileges of God's people. It is almost wonderful that Hyrcanus and the Jews who joined Pompey, did not shudder at the thought of turning their arms against those strong holds which their ancestors had erected to guard the temple from profanation; and which they had shed their blood in defending. But the whole nation was now corrupted by a neglect of the written word of God; and though not given up, as formerly, to the worship of idols, they had declined from the ways of piety and peace, by giving heed to the traditions of men, and by yielding to the evil desires of their own hearts. Let us ever remember that in contemplating the degeneracy of a nation, we see that of an individual also: only on a more extended scale. And let us view and compare the resemblance with fear and trembling.

LETTER XLIII.

POMPEY having examined the fortifications of the temple, found that they were weakest on the north side; and consequently began his operations there. He at first offered the besieged terms of peace; but these being rejected, he sent for engines and battering rams from Tyre, and used his utmost diligence and skill for the speedy reduction of the place. The siege however continued three months, and would very likely have lasted much longer, had not the besieged themselves given him an advantage. According to the law made at the beginning of the Maccabean wars, the Jews did not hesitate to defend their lives when attacked on the Sabbath: but they allowed of no offensive operations, nor any other measures not immediately connected with personal defence. Pompey having observed that on these days no attempts were made to destroy his engines, or disturb his works, profited by the discovery for carrying them on; till he had filled up the ditches and brought his engines to bear so effectually, that a strong tower was thrown down and a breach rendered practicable in the wall adjoining to it. The Roman army now entered the place, making a dreadful slaughter of all they met with: so that no less than twelve thousand are said to have fallen at this time. But the Roman soldiers were not their fiercest enemies: these were found among the Jews of the opposite party, who acted in the most cruel manner towards them. In the midst of these appalling scenes the priests who were officiating in the temple continued the performance of

the sacred rites regardless of their danger. Many of them fell by the sword of their enemies, and had their blood mingled with that of the sacrifices they were offering. This is a proof that notwithstanding the prevalence of impiety and wickedness, there were yet some who adhered to the covenant of their God, and who would not relinquish his service from the fear of man. To such the loss of life at this time would not be a matter of regret; for, being constrained to witness the growing depravity of the people, and the profanation of God's holy temple, they must, like Elijah and Jeremiah, have been desirous of a removal from the turbulent scene.

The temple was taken by Pompey on the ninth day of the fourth month, which was the same day as that on which Nebuchadnezzar had taken Jerusalem in the reign of Zedekiah; and during the fast observed in remembrance of that calamity. When the Romans had taken possession of the place, Pompey, with several other commanders went up to view the temple, and not content with a sight of the exterior, insisted upon entering all parts of it: not excepting even the most holy place. Though the Jews had brought this upon themselves, they were exceedingly angry and grieved at it: not considering that their incense and sacrifices offered without devotion of heart, were an abomination to the Lord; and as much a profanation of his temple as the entrance of the Gentiles could be. There were two thousand talents of gold in the treasury of the temple, but Pompey left that and all the sacred vessels untouched. On the following day he ordered the temple to be cleansed, and the service to be performed in it as usual. But he could not so easily put away the guilt of impiety, nor avert the judgments of God for his pre-

sumption. He had hitherto been prosperous in all his undertakings, but this was his last victory; and you doubtless know his history well enough to remember that he died by violence in a strange land, where he was indebted to two poor men for the last offices of humanity.

When Pompey had thus put an end to the war in Judea he demolished the walls of Jerusalem, and then restored Hyrcanus to the office of high priest and prince of the country; but he deprived him of regal state, and made him tributary to Rome. He also reduced the country to its former limits, not allowing the Jews to retain any of the places they had taken in Syria or elsewhere. These he included in the government of Syria, over which he appointed Scaurus, with two legions to preserve the peace of his province; and having settled every thing to his mind, he departed on his way towards Rome; taking with him Aristobulus, his two sons, and two of his daughters, as captives. The eldest son of Aristobulus named Alexander contrived to effect his escape on the way, and returned to Judea. After Pompey was gone, Aretas king of Arabia again appeared in arms, which obliged Scaurus to take the field against him. The Roman commander, penetrating too far into the dominions of Aretas, got into difficulties, from which he was extricated by Hyrcanus and Antipater: the former supplying his army with provisions; and the latter undertaking an embassy for him, by means of which peace was restored; on condition that Aretas should pay three hundred talents of silver to the governor. After Scaurus, Marcius Philippus, and Lentulus Marcellinus, were successively appointed presidents of Syria. Under them nothing material occurred;

except some predatory incursions of the Arabs. In the fifth year of Hyrcanus, Gabinius, who had been one of Pompey's lieutenants, was made consul for the ensuing year; and had the province of Syria assigned to him. During his government, Alexander the son of Aristobulus, who had escaped from Pompey, having made interest in Judea, and collected an army, seized and garrisoned several strong castles; from whence issuing as he found opportunity, he ravaged the whole country. Hyrcanus being too weak to oppose him in the field, and not daring to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, was obliged to solicit help from the Romans. Gabinius readily complied with his request, and brought a large army into Judea, which being joined by the forces of Hyrcanus, came to an engagement with Alexander near Jerusalem. The latter being defeated with the loss of six thousand men, was obliged to take refuge in the castle of Alexandrion,* where he was immediately besieged by Gabinius. This castle was situated on a high mountain and very strongly fortified: so that Gabinius seeing no prospect of reducing it speedily, turned the siege into a blockade; and leaving part of his army thus employed, marched with the rest to take a survey of the neighbouring country. In this progress Gabinius observed the ruins of several large cities, which had been destroyed by the Asmonean princes, and ordered them to be rebuilt. After this, returning to the siege of Alexandrion, he was met by the mother of Alexander, who, desirous of procuring favour for her husband and children in their captivity, had sought to ingratiate herself with the Romans, by doing them all the service in her power. In this way she had obtained

* So named from Alexander Jannæus, who built it.

such influence with Gabinius, that he readily granted whatever she desired. By her interposition, therefore, a treaty of peace was commenced; on condition that Alexander, giving up all his castles, should be pardoned for this revolt, and allowed to remain at liberty. When the castles were given up, the Romans rased them to the ground, by the advice of Alexander's mother; that they might not again be the occasion of war. Gabinius, after this, went up to Jerusalem, and settled Hyrcanus in the high priesthood. But he made a material change in the civil government, which he reduced to an aristocracy. Hitherto the princes of Judea had governed the country with the assistance of the greater and less Sanhedrims;* but Gabinius putting an end to the authority of the prince and of these councils, divided the country into five provinces, and established in each of them a supreme court independent of the rest. These courts were held at Jerusalem, Jericho, Gadara, Amathus, and Sephoris; and gave decisions on all causes belonging to their respective provinces. Towards the end of this year Aristobulus with his son Antigonus escaping from Rome, came into Judea, and raised new commotions there. On his arrival he was joined by great numbers of the Jews, among whom was Pitholaus hitherto a principal commander for Hyrcanus; but who having at this time some cause for discontent, revolted from him, and brought an armed force to Aristobulus. On this accession of strength the latter formed his followers into an army; and having rebuilt and garrisoned Alexandrion, marched towards Machærus, another fortress which had been lately destroyed: intending to restore that also. But Gabinius hearing of his proceedings, sent a detachment to in-

* See Letter XXVII. page 156; also note O.

percept his march, by whom he was overtaken and defeated. Having escaped to Machærus; with about a thousand of his men, he endeavoured to fortify himself there; but he was soon overpowered, and being severely wounded, was taken prisoner with his son Antigonus, and sent back to Rome. Antigonus, however, with his sisters was allowed to return into Judea; because Gabinius informed the senate that he had promised their release to the wife of Aristobulus, when she gave up the fortresses. In the second year after this, Gabinius undertook an expedition into Egypt, to restore Ptolemy Auletes who had been deposed; and who offered him ten thousand talents for his help. During his absence the government of Syria was left to his son, who was young and inexperienced; and had besides a very inadequate force at his disposal. The consequence was that the whole country was overrun by marauding parties, commanded by different adventurers.

Alexander the son of Aristobulus, profiting by the disturbed state of the country, collected a large force, and taking the field, fell upon the Romans wherever they could be found. Those who could escape from his rage by flight having taken refuge in Mount Gerizim, he there closely besieged them. This was the state in which Gabinius found the affairs of Syria on his return. The great number of Alexander's followers made him desirous of using means of conciliation, in preference to force. He therefore sent Antipater to them, with promises of impunity for the past; if they would desist from their rebellion. Many of them accepted these terms; but Alexander having an army of thirty thousand men, determined to risk a battle. An engagement therefore ensued, in which he and his followers were

defeated, and put to flight. After this, Gabinius went up to Jerusalem; and there settled every thing according to the desire of Antipater, who had been very useful to him in his expedition to Egypt. When Gabinius came again into Syria, he received orders to resign the government to Crassus, and return to Rome. The new governor was a man of rapacious character: even surpassing his predecessor in that respect. When he arrived in his province, which was assigned to him for five years, he began to take methods for gratifying his covetous propensity; and having heard that the temple at Jerusalem contained great riches, he marched thither to seize them. Eleazar one of the priests, who was treasurer of the temple, perceiving the design of Crassus, offered to give him a bar of gold which was in his possession, on condition that he would spare all the vessels, and other valuables which he had in charge. The bar of gold weighed three hundred Minæ, and was concealed in a beam, which Eleazar took down, after Crassus had promised with an oath to be satisfied with it. But he had no sooner got possession of it than, disregarding his oath, he seized the two thousand talents Pompey had spared; and robbed the temple of everything valuable he could find, to the amount of ten thousand Roman talents.* This immense sum he applied to execute a favourite project of his: that of making war on the Parthians. And never were the wages of perjury and sacrilege used more effectually to the destruction of their possessor. For he acted so imprudently in this war, that his conduct seemed to be the result of infatuation, rather than of reason. Contrary to the advice of his friends and allies, he followed strange guides, who,

* Above £2,000,000 sterling. - See note P.

being employed by the Parthians for that purpose, led him into their power so completely that he was cut off, and thirty thousand of his men killed or taken prisoners. I need not remind you that the disposal of events is in the hands of that God whose temple Crassus had violated; nor draw the inference, so striking in this case, that a signal punishment was awarded him, for his impious profanation. The Parthians, after the defeat of Crassus, thinking to find Syria totally unprotected, made an attempt on that country. But Cassius who had escaped with the remnant of the Roman army, made such a determined stand against them, that they were obliged to retreat. When they were gone, Cassius began to settle the affairs of the province; and marching into Judea laid siege to Tarichea, where Pitholaus had shut himself up, with the adherents of Aristobulus. Cassius having reduced the place, put Pitholaus to death, by the advice of Antipater; and carried the other Jews he found there into captivity. After this he brought Alexander to terms of peace, and having thus quieted matters at home, he marched against the Parthians.

LETTER XLIV.

In the fourteenth year of Hyrcanus began the civil war between Julius Cæsar and Pompey, and in the following year, Aristobulus and his son Alexander were both put to death. Cæsar on his coming to Rome had released the former out of prison, and sent him into Judea, with two legions, to maintain his interest against Pompey, in that country; but on his way thither he was

poisoned by the agents of Pompey. In the meantime Alexander, expecting his father's arrival, raised forces to join him; for which Metellus Scipio the governor of Syria, who was father-in-law to Pompey, brought him to trial, and caused him to be beheaded.

While the Asmonean family were thus falling off, the interests of Antipater were daily advancing. During the war which Julius Cæsar carried on in favour of Cleopatra, in Egypt, he having joined him with three thousand Jews, did him great service, not only by his valour, but by his interest with the Jews who were settled in that country. Cæsar was so sensible of the benefits conferred by them, that before he left Alexandria, he confirmed all their privileges; and ordered a pillar to be set up, on which his decree to that effect was engraved. In the spring of this year the revolt of Pharnaces brought Cæsar into Syria; and while he remained there, Antigonus came to him, representing that his father and brother had lost their lives from attachment to his interest; and begging his assistance against Antipater and Hyrcanus. The former of these, who still attended Cæsar, defended his own cause and that of Hyrcanus so well, that the suit of Antigonus was rejected; and Hyrcanus was not only confirmed in the office of high priest, but had the principality of Judea restored, for himself and his descendants. By this decree of Cæsar the enactments of Gabinius were annulled; and the kingdom of Judea was settled according to its former constitution.

Cæsar also appointed Antipater to be procurator of Judea, under Hyrcanus; in consideration of the service he had rendered him. Nor was it to Cæsar only that he had been useful: for his foresight and skill had ac-

aired him so much interest in Judea, and the neighbouring countries, that he was in a manner necessary to all the Roman governors. He had at this time four sons grown up; and soon after his promotion by Cæsar, he made Phasael, the eldest, governor of Jerusalem, and gave the district of Galilee to Herod, the second. Herod, who was twenty-five years of age, was no sooner settled in his new command, than he attacked a strong party of thieves who infested Galilee; and having taken their chief, with several of his associates, caused them to be put to death. This action gained him some reputation in his neighbourhood, as well as with the president of Syria; but it was represented to Hyrcanus as an assumption of undue authority: since he had put these men to death without a legal trial; and he was consequently cited before the sanhedrim to answer for it. Herod obeyed the summons; but when he appeared clothed in purple and surrounded by his guards, the members of the sanhedrim were so intimidated that they all kept silence, except one named Sameas, who first reproving Herod for daring to appear in that court habited as a prince instead of a criminal, and presuming to obstruct the course of justice by the presence of an armed force, next turned his censures upon Hyrcanus and the court, for their tacit submission to such audacity: telling them that though they now spared Herod; he would not hereafter spare them. Hyrcanus was inclined still to favour Herod; not only because he had an affection for him, but on account of a threatening letter he had received from Sextus Cæsar the president of Syria. But the members of the sanhedrim, roused by the reproaches of Sameas, now clamoured for judgment upon him. Hyrcanus therefore adjourned the court to the next

day; and in the meantime prevailed on Herod to withdraw from Jerusalem. He accordingly left the city that night, and went to Damascus; where putting himself under the protection of Sextus Cæsar, he defied the power of the sanhedrim. While Herod staid at Damascus, he became so great a favourite with the president, that for a sum of money he obtained the government of Cœlo-Syria. As he had now the power of raising troops, he collected a considerable force, and marched with it into Judea; intending to depose Hyrcanus, and destroy the whole sanhedrim, in revenge for their late proceedings against him. By the interposition of Antipater and Phasael, he was, however, prevailed on to recede from his purpose.

On the day of Cæsar's entering on his fifth consulship, Hyrcanus made a request to him for permission to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem which Pompey had demolished. This he readily granted, in return for the services done to him by the Jews in Egypt and Syria; and a decree being passed for that purpose, Antipater set about the work, and soon restored the city to its former state of external strength. It would have been well if he could also have restored its former defence, when the joy of the Lord was the strength of the people; when Jerusalem was a holy city; when peace was within her walls, and prosperity within her palaces. But, alas! those times were gone by; the glory was departed, and the period was fast approaching when the measure of her iniquity would be full, and her destruction inevitable. Her annals present henceforth only a catalogue of crimes and miseries, which it might be desirable to bury in oblivion, did not they afford a proof of the long-suffering and tender mercy of the Lord in thus waiting to be

gracious; in seeking by every means to gather her children, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings; in desiring to save her from that fearful sentence, by which her house would be left unto her desolate.

LETTER XLV.

It is, I presume, superfluous to inform you of the manner in which Julius Cæsar lost his life, when he was on the point of making war on the Parthians, in order to avenge the disgrace and defeat of the Romans under Crassus. His death caused a new civil war, and general confusion in all the provinces. Cassius having seized Cilicia, Syria, and Palestine, made himself master of Judea also. To maintain his power in these countries, he had an army of twelve legions, for the support of which he raised heavy contributions on the inhabitants. The sum demanded from Judea was seven hundred talents, which Antipater exerted himself to raise: appointing his two sons and Malichus to assist him. Herod was the first to bring his contingent, by which he gained the favour of Cassius. But some of the cities failing in their contributions, Cassius ordered the inhabitants to be sold by auction, for the raising of them; and Malichus would have been put to death by him on the same account, had not Hyrcanus sent a hundred talents to redeem him. Soon after this, Cassius went into Syria, to oppose Dolabella, and while he was there Malichus treacherously contrived the death of Antipater, of whose influence with Hyrcanus he was jealous;

though he shared it next to him; and had, on many occasions, received distinguished marks of kindness and protection from him. Antipater had received intimations of his treachery, some time before, and used precautions against it; but was induced by his oaths and protestations to consider the imputation as a calumny, and to treat him with his wonted confidence. This however failed of the desired effect: for Malichus, still fostering his ambitious projects, bribed the butler of Hyrcanus to poison Antipater, and when he had thus removed him, seized the government of Jerusalem, by means of an armed force. Notwithstanding this violence, he endeavoured to persuade Herod and Phasaël that he was innocent of their father's death; but they were not deceived on this point; and Herod would immediately have taken vengeance on the murderer, had not Phasaël urged the danger of incurring a civil war; and prevailed on him to wait for a more seasonable opportunity. The brothers therefore dissembled towards Malichus, appearing to credit his protestations; but Herod in the meantime, having made the affair known to Cassius, obtained his permission to avenge the murder; with an order to his soldiers at Tyre to assist him if needful. Cassius was then besieging Laodicea, and when he had reduced that place all the princes and nobles of Palestine hastening to congratulate him, Herod with Hyrcanus and Malichus went among the rest. When they approached Tyre, Herod privately sent the order of Cassius to the Roman commander there, who dispatched a party of soldiers to meet Malichus and kill him. Had he reached Tyre, his intention was to steal away his son who was there as a hostage, and then to return to Jerusalem and make himself master of the kingdom. Though the death

of Malichus put an end to all his ambitious schemes, it did not save his country from the horrors of a civil war; for those of his party at Jerusalem took up arms to avenge it on the sons of Antipater. Cassius by this time had left Syria to join Brutus; and Herod was at Damascus confined by sickness. The insurgents were assisted by Felix commander of the Roman troops in Jerusalem; and countenanced by Hyrcanus, who allowed the brother of Malichus to take possession of Massada, and several other strong places in Judea. Phasael had to withstand this powerful faction alone; but he was completely successful in expelling all the members of it from Jerusalem; and when Herod returned, they were suppressed in other places also. The brothers were greatly displeased with Hyrcanus, for taking part against them; and keenly reproached him for his ingratitude: since it was to their father he owed his present elevation and safety. But as Herod was about to espouse Mariamne the grand-daughter of Hyrcanus, they took no farther notice of his conduct in this particular. Though peace was thus restored, it did not continue long; for the factious party sending for Antigonus the younger son of Aristobulus, created new disturbances under pretext of raising him to the throne of his father. Besides his adherents in Judea, Antigonus had three of the neighbouring princes to assist him; by which means he raised an army, and took the field to assert his claim. Herod however encountered him in battle, and after gaining a complete victory, recovered all the places that had been seized by the insurgents, in Galilee; and then returned in triumph to Jerusalem.

After the battle of Philippi, Antony passed into Asia to settle the affairs of the Romans in that quarter. On

his arrival, ambassadors from all parts waited on him to solicit his favour and protection ; and among these were some principal men from Judea, who came with an accusation against Herod and Phasael for usurping the government. Herod, however, being present, and bringing some interest with Antony, who had received great favours from Antipater, prevailed on him not to hear them. Not long after this, Hyrcanus sent other ambassadors, to beg the restoration of the territories Cassius had taken from him, and the freedom of those Jews whom he had sold ; both of which requests were immediately granted by Antony. The factious party in Judea again applied to him, against the sons of Antipater : sending a deputation of a hundred men to Antioch for that purpose. Hyrcanus being then present, Antony called upon him to declare his opinion, which he gave in favour of the accused. For Herod having by marriage become one of his family, he was on that account induced to promote his interest. Antony having this testimony to confirm his own prepossession in favour of the brothers, made them both tetrarchs, and entrusted all the affairs of Judea to them. He also imprisoned fifteen of the complainants ; and would have put them to death, had not Herod, by his intercession, induced him to spare their lives. The heavy contributions levied by Antony for the support of his army and the indulgence of his own luxurious excesses, became so burdensome, that some of the people of Syria agreed to call in the Parthians to assist in expelling him. In consequence of this invitation, a large army from that nation crossed the Euphrates, under Pacorus the king's son, and Labienus, a Roman general, who had formerly belonged to Pompey. Antony was now in Egypt past

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affairs induced both parties to desire an accommodation; and Antigonus artfully proposed that they should call in the Parthian general, who was encamped without the walls, to arbitrate between them. This being agreed to, he was invited into the city, and hospitably entertained at the house of Phasaël. The wily Parthian, who was named Pacorus,* wrought himself so completely into the confidence of his host, that he prevailed on him to go on an embassy to Barzabarnes, the new governor of Syria, and to take Hyrcanus with him. Phasaël did this contrary to the advice of Herod, who had no faith in the Parthians; and he felt the effects of his credulity, for they had no sooner got him and Hyrcanus in their power than they put them both in chains. A plan was concerted for seizing Herod also, at Jerusalem; but he, having timely notice of it, withdrew by night, with his family, and as many soldiers as he could get together; and escaped to the fortress of Massada. When Herod was gone from Jerusalem, the Parthians, after plundering the city and its neighbourhood, made Antigonus king of Judea, according to their promise, and delivered Hyrcanus and Phasaël into his power. He spared the life of the former, but prevented his reassuming the office of high priest by cutting off his ears;† and sent him back to the Parthians, that he might be out of his way. Phasaël, not doubting that his death was determined on, destroyed himself in prison. While these events were passing at Jerusalem, Herod, having placed his family in safety at Massada, and furnished the place with provisions for

* Not the king's son, but an officer of his court, who bore the same name.

† Leviticus xxi. 16.

several months, left his brother Joseph with a garrison of eight hundred men, to defend it; and went himself to Petra in Arabia, to solicit the aid of Malchus the king of that place, to whom he had shown great kindness on many occasions. Malchus, however, no sooner heard of his distress, than he ordered him to quit his dominions; alleging that the Parthians had forbidden him to assist him in any way. Herod, thus repulsed, dismissed the greater part of his followers, and determined on going into Egypt. On his way thither he was informed of the death of his brother Phasaël, and the state of his affairs at Jerusalem; therefore hastening to Alexandria, he embarked in order to go to Rome, and make his case known to Antony. While he was on his way, a great change was effected in the affairs of Syria; for Antony having reconciled himself to Octavius, by marrying his sister, and obtained for his portion of the empire all the countries east of the Adriatic, had sent an army into Syria, under the command of Ventidius; by whose courage and skill the Parthians being subdued and compelled to repass the Euphrates, the whole province was again brought under the dominion of the Romans. When Herod arrived at Rome, he was kindly received by Antony, who partly from personal regard, and partly from the inducement of a large sum of money, undertook to help him. In this he greatly exceeded the expectations of Herod himself; for he came merely to solicit aid for Aristobulus, the grandson and lawful successor of Hyrcanus; without requiring any thing more for himself, than that he might hold the government under him. But Antony having gained the concurrence of Octavius, made such representations of the services done to the Roman people by Antipater,

and of the assistance he expected from Herod against the Parthians, that the senate bestowed on him the kingdom of Judea; and declared Antigonius an enemy to the Roman state. Herod was accordingly conducted with great honour to the capitol; and the decree of the senate being deposited among the public records there, he was solemnly inaugurated according to the Roman custom. After this unexpected success he did not long delay his return to Judea, but hastening to Brundisium embarked there, and sailing into Syria, landed at Ptolemais about three months after his flight from Jerusalem. His first desire was to relieve the fortress of Massada, which was closely besieged by Antigonius. He therefore raised an army, composed not only of Jews, but of foreigners, and such Roman auxiliaries as he could obtain; and having made himself master of Galilee, and taken Joppa, he proceeded to Massada, where he raised the siege. When he had thus rescued his friends, he took the strong fortress of Ressa in Idumea; and then marched back to join Silo, who, with a body of Roman soldiers, was sent to promote his interest. Silo, however, rather obstructed the progress of Herod than advanced it; for being very corrupt, he received large sums from Antigonius as well as from Herod, and did not assist either of them. The soldiers under his command went early into winter quarters; but Herod still kept the field, and dividing his army into two parts, sent one of them under his brother Joseph into Idumea, while he with the other went into Samaria, where he placed his family and friends in safety; and then proceeded to Galilee, in which country some places still held out for Antigonius. After reducing them, he undertook to expel the thieves that infested the neighbourhood, and were now so numerous

and bold as to engage his whole force in battle. They were however defeated and driven out of the country; except a few who hid themselves among the mountains. The season being now far advanced, Herod dismissed his army into winter quarters, where he took especial care to provide them, as well as the Roman soldiers, with every thing needful. On the return of spring he went again in search of the thieves; but the difficulty was how to get at them, for they lay concealed in caves and inaccessible parts of the mountains. His efforts however were not to be checked by difficulties: for he caused large vehicles filled with soldiers to be lowered from the tops of the rocks, and thus succeeded in destroying all that were lurking among them. Hoping that he had secured the peace of Galilee, Herod now returned into Samaria, to prosecute the war against Antigonus; but he was soon recalled by the return of those thieves whom he had driven out at the beginning of the winter. He was not, however, long detained by them: for using the same vigorous exertions as before, he succeeded in putting an end to their ravages entirely.

LETTER XLVI.

THE Roman general Ventidius, whom Antony had sent against the Parthians, hearing that they were preparing for another invasion of Syria, contrived a stratagem by which he gained so much time and advantage of ground, that he gave them a signal defeat. Antony jealous of the reputation thus obtained by his lieutenant, came into Syria, and taking the command of the army, sent

Ventidius home. Herod in the meantime returned into Judea to carry on his operations there; and Antony sent two legions and a thousand horse, under the command of Machærus, to assist him. The Roman general desiring to confer with Antigonus approached the walls of Jerusalem for that purpose: but the archers and slingers attacking him from the ramparts, he was so greatly enraged, that turning back, he fell upon all the Jews he met; without discriminating friends from enemies. Some of Herod's adherents having fallen victims to this fury, he went immediately to complain of it to Antony; but Machærus hastening after him, entreated him to overlook the past; and a reconciliation was consequently effected. Herod however determined to continue his journey in order to pay his respects to Antony; therefore leaving his brother Joseph to command in Judea, with strict injunctions to keep on the defensive, he proceeded to Samosata in Commagena, which the Romans were at that time besieging. He was received with great honour, by Antony, to whom he made himself very useful in the siege; but in the meantime his affairs at home assumed a very unfavourable aspect. Joseph his brother, neglecting the order he had given, went on an expedition against Jericho, in which he not only failed, but lost the greater part of his men, and his own life. This reverse raised the hopes of those who favoured Antigonus; and was immediately followed by revolts in Idumea and Galilee. Herod hearing of these misfortunes on his way home, hastened into Judea in order to prevent farther mischief, and apply the best remedies in his power. With such troops as he could raise on the way, and two cohorts of Romans he made war on the insurgents of Galilee, and soon reduced them. After

this he marched to Jericho to avenge the death of Joseph; but the adherents of Antigonus there being very numerous, he was overpowered by them, and received a wound in the attempt. No way discouraged by this check, Herod soon collected a larger force; and taking the field, encountered the main body of Antigonus, which under Pappus one of his principal officers, was ready to follow up the advantages lately gained over him and his brother. The battle which ensued was decisive: for Herod gained a complete victory. Pappus with most of his men fell in the action or pursuit, and the victors might have marched immediately to take Jerusalem, had not the rigour of the season obliged them to go into winter quarters. Early in the spring, however, Herod brought a large army into the field, and marching directly to Jerusalem laid siege to that city. When he had given orders for the needful operations, he withdrew for a time to Samaria, in order to celebrate his marriage with Mariamne, to whom he had been betrothed four years. She was daughter to Alexander the brother of Antigonus, by Alexandra daughter of Hyrcanus the second; so that she was not only granddaughter to the latter, but to Aristobulus his brother also. Mariamne was highly distinguished by the charms of her person, and the attainments of her mind; but these inducements, though very powerful, were not the only motives of Herod in this alliance. The Jews still retained a great affection for the Asmonean family, notwithstanding all they had suffered from their disputes since the death of John Hyrcanus; and Herod flattered himself that by marrying into it, he should conciliate the people, which at this time he was particularly anxious to do. On his return to the army, he was joined by

Sosius the governor of Syria, with a large body of Roman soldiers. The united forces, amounting to no less than sixty thousand men, carried on a vigorous siege; and they were as vigorously repelled by those within, who sustained all their efforts during more than six months. But the conduct of the latter was by no means equal to their courage; in consequence of which the assailants ultimately prevailed. When the city was taken, the Roman soldiers, exasperated by the length and hardships of the siege, began to pillage all quarters of it, putting to death all they could find; and Sosius, instead of restraining them by his authority, rather encouraged their depredations. Herod finding himself unable to check them, complained to Sosius: telling him that, in this way, the Romans would only make him king of a desert. The covetous Roman merely replied that the spoil of the city was due to the soldiers, for their valour in taking it; and Herod found himself obliged to give a large sum of money, to redeem the place from farther ravages. When Antigonus perceived that all was lost, he surrendered himself in an abject manner to Sosius; entreating his compassion. The latter, however, despising the meanness of his submission, treated him with contempt, and putting him in chains, sent him to Antony on his return into Syria. Antigonus would have been spared by Antony, who wished to keep him for his triumph; but Herod, not thinking himself safe in his kingdom while he was alive, by continual solicitations and a large sum of money prevailed on Antony to put him to death. With him ended the dominion of the Asmonean princes, which had lasted one hundred and twenty-nine years from the death of Mattathias; and which had latterly proved as

tal to the nation as it had formerly been beneficial to

Under Judas, Jonathan, Simon, and John Hyrcanus ho sought to promote the welfare of the people by a rict adherence to the law of God, great deliverances ere wrought for them, and great prosperity was ultimately attained. But when the traditions of men were substituted for the written word of God, the morals of ne people and of their princes were rapidly undermined. The former became impious, contentious, and rebellious ; and the latter, regardless of the honour conferred on hem as high priests and rulers of the Lord's people, coveted the vain glory of regal pomp, and the distinctions valued by the heathens. Such indeed was their mad ambition, that murders and civil war were the continual effects of it for more than a century. What a contrast is displayed between the period when they joined in heart and hand for the defence of the temple and the expulsion of the heathen, and that in which they brought the Romans against their brethren into the very precincts of the sanctuary. This degeneracy was the precursor of rapid declension and final ruin. They had made strangers the arbiters of their ambitious contentions, and a stranger was now appointed to rule over them. They had sought help and protection from the Romans, and the time was fast approaching when their chosen protectors would become their persecutors. They had refused the blessings set before them in the word of God : and blessing was far removed from them. They had exercised themselves in malice, hatred, and revenge, till their hearts were hardened through the deceitfulness of sin, and the excess of their national guilt was fatally hurrying them to destruction.

LETTER XLVII.

THE taking of Jerusalem put Herod in possession of the kingdom of Judea; but it was not without opposition that he established himself in it: for the greater part of the Jews would not acknowledge him. He had made his way to the throne by the death of many of his people; and he found it needful to sacrifice many more to maintain his elevation. Among the latter were all the members of the great sanhedrim, except Sameas and Pollio. These two during the siege had exhorted the people to yield to Herod; telling them that the number and magnitude of their sins left them nothing to expect; but that God would give them up into his power. But the rest of the counsellors opposed these arguments; and continually exclaiming, The temple of the Lord! The temple of the Lord! buoyed up the hopes of the people by a persuasion that God would avert the threatened evil for the sake of his sanctuary; though they had so long continued to profane it by their crimes. This dissuasive expectation proceeded from their ignorance of God's word. Had they consulted that, they would have understood that the blessing or the curse set before them was not connected with any edifice they could raise, or any observances merely ritual; but depended on their devotion to God, or their departure from his laws. After Herod had procured the death of Antigonus, he sent to Babylonia for a priest named Ananias, whom he invested with the dignity of high priest. This man had been formerly known to Herod, who made choice of him as being an obscure person, whose family

connexions were at a distance; and whose credit and influence in Judea would therefore not be likely to interfere with his authority. Hyrcanus, who as you doubtless remember, was given up to the Parthians by his nephew Antigonus, had been carried by them in their flight as far as Seleucia, where for some time he remained a close prisoner. He had lately been set at liberty by Phraates king of Parthia; and allowed to live among the Jews in Babylonia, by whom he was revered as their high priest and king, and maintained in a manner suitable to his rank. When he heard that Herod had obtained the kingdom, he was desirous of returning into Judea: for as he had formerly shown great kindness to him, especially when his life was in danger from the sentence of the sanhedrim, he now hoped for a return of kindness, and the enjoyment of his favour and protection. Herod was no less anxious to have him in his power, though with very different views; he therefore sent him a pressing invitation, and at the same time dispatched an embassy to Phraates, to beg that he might be permitted to accept it. Permission being granted by Phraates, Hyrcanus left Babylonia, contrary to the advice of all his friends there; and returned to Jerusalem. The elevation of Ananias to the high priesthood gave great offence in Judea; particularly as Aristobulus, the brother of Mariamne, whose right it was, had thereby been set aside. The queen and her mother Alexandra dwelt continually on this subject: so that Herod had no peace in his family. Nor was this all: for Alexandra wrote to Cleopatra queen of Egypt, and used other means to bring the affair before Antony. Herod, intimidated by these measures, and desirous of restoring peace in his family,

yielded to the solicitations of the queen and her mother; and deposing Ananelus, made Aristobulus high priest in his stead. Alexandra, however, did not long rest satisfied with the dignity to which her son had attained: for considering him equally entitled to the regal authority, she endeavoured to procure that also for him, by applying to Cleopatra. Herod, getting intelligence of this correspondence, caused Alexandra to be confined to the palace; and placed spies about her to watch all her proceedings. These measures were so offensive to her, that considering herself a prisoner, she concerted a plan with Cleopatra for escaping into Egypt: intending to take her son with her. A vessel was accordingly provided at the nearest sea-port, whither the fugitives were to be carried in coffins, to escape detection. But Herod getting notice of the whole design by means of his emissaries, allowed it to proceed till they were actually on the road; when he caused them to be seized and brought back to Jerusalem. He did not however dare to punish them, for fear of Cleopatra; therefore making a parade of his clemency, he pretended to overlook their misconduct; but from that moment he resolved on the death of Aristobulus. This young prince was now seventeen years of age; and was regarded by the people with great affection, as being the only male descendant of the Asmonean family. He had also a very graceful person; which appeared to such advantage, when for the first time he put on the pontifical robes, that universal admiration was excited, and expressed on that occasion: Herod's jealousy, which wanted not this stimulus, was now raised to the highest pitch, and he determined to effect his purpose without delay. He therefore invited Aristobulus to an entertainment at Jericho; where he

contrived to have him drowned while bathing after dinner. Several of Herod's attendants, instructed by him, went to partake of this refreshment, and the young prince was persuaded to join them. Pretending to be in sport, they kept him under water till he was dead; and then represented the matter as an accident. To make this the more apparent, Herod performed the part of a mourner, by shedding tears, and evincing other tokens of grief; but this mask was insufficient to cover his guilt, which was only rendered more flagrant by his hypocrisy. Alexandra was inconsolable for the loss of her son; and not doubting that his death had been contrived by Herod, she determined, if possible, to avenge it. She therefore wrote an account of the horrid transaction to Cleopatra, and engaged her to make it known to Antony. The queen of Egypt readily undertook the impeachment of Herod; not because she cared to gratify Alexandra, but because she coveted the kingdom of Judea, which she meant to demand of Antony, in case Herod were put to death for this crime. In the following spring, therefore, when Antony came into Syria, she accompanied him, and was so urgent in her solicitations against Herod, that he was summoned to appear and answer to the charge. But when he came before Antony, his flattering speeches and large bribes had such an effect, that he escaped with impunity. Cleopatra indeed did her utmost; but when Antony gave her Cælo-Syria instead of Judea, she also was content to let the matter rest without pressing it farther. Herod had not been quite fearless as to the result of this visit; and he had made some extraordinary provisions respecting it. He left his uncle Joseph in charge of the government, with instructions to put Mariamne to death, in

case he were condemned by Antony. For the latter having heard of her great beauty, Herod imagined that he might put him to death for her sake; and therefore determined to disappoint such an expectation, if it existed. During Herod's absence Joseph had frequent access to Mariamne, and on these occasions failed not to expatiate on Herod's great affection for her: urging as a proof of it, that he could neither live without her, nor suffer death to part them; and telling her in confidence the order he had received. Mariamne and her mother were greatly displeased at this intelligence; and the latter immediately resolved to counteract the unworthy purpose of Herod.

Shortly after this a report reached the city that he was dead; upon hearing of which she planned an escape for herself and Mariamne; but before it was put into effect, the report was contradicted, and Herod's arrival in safety proved it unfounded. Salome his sister-informed him of what had passed during his absence; and though Joseph was her husband, she did not hesitate to prefer base insinuations against him. For being jealous of Mariamne's superiority, in point of birth and beauty, she resolved on her ruin at any cost. Herod was at first greatly enraged against his queen, but when he coolly investigated her conduct and could find no cause of blame, he begged her to overlook his base expressions of displeasure, and assured her of his great affection for her. Mariamne imprudently answered that he had indeed given proof of his affection by ordering his innocent wife to be put to death, in the event of his own decease. Herod's rage and jealousy were instantly rekindled when he found that Joseph had disclosed this secret; and he was on the point of sacrificing Mariamne

to his fury. The great love he felt for her however restrained him; but he gave immediate orders for Joseph's death, without allowing him a hearing: and judging that Alexandra had been instrumental in the troubles he experienced, he ordered her to be put in chains and imprisoned. The war between Octavius and Antony breaking out in the sixth year of Herod, he prepared an army to assist the latter. But when he was on the point of marching to join him, Antony sent letters to excuse him from that service, and appoint him to make war on Malchus the king of Arabia Petraea, who had given offence to Cleopatra. Herod on receiving these orders marched against Malchus and obtained a victory over him; but in a second engagement he was defeated, with the loss of nearly all his followers. This calamity was soon followed by another: for an earthquake happened in Judea which destroyed about thirty thousand of the inhabitants. The distress occasioned by this induced Herod to make overtures of peace to the Arabians; but they, having heard an exaggerated account of the matter, put his ambassadors to death, and hastily invaded Judea in the hope of finding the country without defence. In this however they were disappointed; for Herod's soldiers, being encamped, had not suffered from the earthquake; and he encouraging them by a speech, led them to meet the enemy, who in two successive battles were so completely defeated, that he brought them to sue for peace on his own terms; and then returned in triumph to Jerusalem. After the total overthrow of Antony at Actium, Herod, who had hitherto faithfully adhered to him; thought it expedient to provide for his own safety, by making his peace with Octavius. Being doubtful of success in

his application to the latter, he settled all the affairs of his kingdom before he proceeded to make it; and with his usual inhuman policy removed all the obstacles that might interfere with his arrangements. The most considerable of these was poor old Hyscanus, who, as he had formerly been acknowledged by the Romans, and had been dethroned without their consent, by the Parthians, might at this time be restored. A false accusation was therefore brought against him, of holding a correspondence with Malchus; and on this pretence he was put to death. Herod's next care was to commit the government and the charge of his family to Pheroras his brother, whom he appointed to succeed in the event of his death. Mariamne with her mother was placed in the castle of Alexandrion, with a strong guard, under two of his most faithful adherents. To one of these, named Sohemus, he gave a secret injunction to put them to death, in case his life was not spared, by Octavius. When all at home was thus settled, he went to meet Octavius, who was lately come to Rhodes; and having obtained an audience, he laid aside his diadem, and freely acknowledged the friendship he had shown towards Antony: adding that he should not now withdraw it, could it be any way serviceable; but as that was not possible, he should be happy to display the same fidelity in serving Octavius. This frank address was highly pleasing to the latter, who not only accepted Herod's proffered friendship, but ordered him to resume his diadem, and confirmed him in his kingdom. The success of this interview was extremely gratifying to Herod, and he returned with great joy to his kingdom and family. Here however all his pleasure was alloyed by the reception he met with from his beloved Mariamne,

which was not only cold, but repulsive. Schemus, with the same imprudence as Joseph, had betrayed the secret of his commission, the knowledge of which, with the injuries done to her family, had so completely alienated her affection from Herod, that he could by no means regain it. Octavius, on leaving Rhodes, passed through Asia Minor into Syria, on his way to Egypt. When he arrived at Ptolemais, Herod waited on him there; and not only treated him and his army with great magnificence, but furnished them with provisions sufficient for their march, and presented eight hundred talents to Octavius, who, as well as his followers, was much pleased with this liberality. After the death of Antony, when Octavius had made himself master of Egypt, Herod again visited him in that country; and accompanying him from thence as far as Antioch, obtained distinguished marks of his favour and friendship, with several grants of territory, which considerably enlarged his dominions. No real addition was, however, made to his enjoyments: for when he returned home he found Mariamne just as he had left her; and was by no means able to assuage the resentment she expressed, not only to himself, but to his mother and sister, whom she continually reproached with the meanness of their birth, and who on that account determined to ruin her. This unhappy state of his family affairs was very perplexing to Herod, who knew nothing of Schemus's imprudence. Sometimes in a rage he was ready to destroy his beloved wife; but his affection for her continually disarmed his fury. On one of these occasions, however, when his proffered carcasses were rejected with bitter reproaches for the murder of her relations, and his rage was excited to the utmost, Salome sent his butler,

whom she had corrupted, to accuse Mariamne of attempting by his means to poison him. Herod immediately ordered a confidential slave of the queen's to be tortured, and from him learned that something told her by Sohemus had made her very angry. This made him jealous of Sohemus, whom he immediately caused to be put to death; and increased his rage against Mariamne, whom he speedily brought to a trial. The judges, who were his creatures, finding that he desired a sentence of death to be passed on her, complied with his wish; though they did not suppose that it would lead to a fatal termination. Nor indeed was this the intention of Herod; but his mother and sister having obtained their cruel purpose thus far, persuaded him that the people would revolt in her favour; and by exciting his fears procured an order for her execution. Poor Mariamne went to the place of her death with calmness and intrepidity, and submitted to her sentence without a murmur. On her way she was accosted by her mother, who vehemently reproached her with ingratitude to her kind and affectionate husband. Mariamne made no reply to this accusation; but her countenance expressed some concern for this extravagant conduct on the part of her mother. Alexandra's motive on this occasion was the fear that her turn would come next; and she artfully strove to avert what she dreaded, by apparent displeasure towards her unhappy daughter. Herod's wrath was no sooner allayed by the death of his queen; than his love for her returned with all its former strength; and agonies of sorrow and regret tormented him without intermission. It was in vain that he strove to banish his remorse by wine, company, and diversions; the image of Mariamne

pursued him continually; till at last he became distracted, and frequently called for her; desiring her to be brought to him, as if she were still alive. A dreadful pestilence ravaged Judea at this time: carrying off great numbers of all ranks. This the people considered as a judgment of God, for the death of the queen: not reflecting, perhaps, that it was a warning to them also; and intended to lead them to repentance. This visitation increasing the distress of Herod, he knew not which way to turn for relief; the horrors of his mind overcame his accustomed energy, and retiring to Samaria, he there fell into a dangerous illness. A considerable time elapsed before he was able to resume the cares of government; and when he did so, it was only to exercise more tyranny and greater cruelties than before. Such is the invariable effect of remorse when unconnected with repentance. It is that "sorrow of the world which worketh death:" having a tendency to sour the temper and harden the heart.

LETTER XLVIII.

DURING Herod's illness Alexandra had been taking measures to secure the government to herself, in case of his death, under pretence of ensuring it to his sons by Mariamne; and for this purpose she made overtures to the governors of the two castles at Jerusalem. They, however, not approving of her proposals, made them known to Herod, who immediately ordered her to be put to death. Thus ended the career of this unhappy woman, whose restless ambition had been the origin of so much evil to her family. Had she been satisfied with

the honour conferred on her son when he was raised to the high priesthood, he might have escaped the jealous watchfulness of Herod, and its fatal result. And had she educated her daughter in the fear of God, and taught her a due estimate of worldly distinctions; the latter would not, by her scornful reproaches, have provoked the malice of Salome and Cyprus, which as we have seen was the cause of her destruction. The death of Alexandra did not satiate the revengeful desires of Salome; for though she was the last of the Asmonean family, there were still some individuals who had shown their attachment to her interests. These were accused of plotting against Herod, and were consequently put to death: the chief evidence against them was given by Salome, who on this occasion caused the death of her second husband, as she had formerly done that of her first. She now pretended great attachment to her brother, with whom she chose to reside, and in whom she found a congeniality to her own hateful qualities. When Herod had put to death all whom he deemed likely to excite opposition, and thus as he thought rendered himself secure in his kingdom, he began to infringe on the established laws and customs by the introduction of many innovations. He built at Jerusalem a theatre, and an amphitheatre in which games were celebrated, and shows exhibited, in honour of Augustus. Some trophies he set up in the former, gave great offence to the people, who regarded them as images; but he removed their scruples by taking off the armour in the presence of many of them, and showing them that there was under it only the stem of a tree. He could not however obviate their dislike to his other novelties, which was so strong that a conspiracy was formed to assassi-

him ; and ten persons armed with daggers awaited entrance into the theatre, to effect their purpose. Herod, however, just as he was going in, received intimation of the plot by one of his spies ; and the conspirators were immediately seized and put to death by cruel tortures ; but the informer fared no better : for the people meeting him shortly after, fell upon him and put him to death. This occasioned new executions ; as Herod's strict scrutiny discovered all who were concerned in the affair ; and made them suffer for it.

These circumstances gave Herod to understand that he was not so secure as he had imagined ; and induced him to provide for his safety in various ways. Deeming it expedient to have other places of strength besides Jerusalem, he determined on building such ; and began with Samaria. This city had been destroyed by John Hyrcanus, and from that time had lain in ruins, till Gabinius ordered the rebuilding of it, when he was governor of Syria. It had not however risen to any thing more than a village, till Herod restored its former splendour, and caused it to be inhabited. Instead of its ancient name, he called it Sebaste, in honour of Augustus. The people of Judea were this year called to repentance, by great national calamities. A famine, the consequence of a long drought, was succeeded by a pestilence, which carried off great numbers of them. Herod took great pains to alleviate the general distress ; and even melted down his own plate, in order to purchase corn, of which there was abundance in Egypt.

The drought had proved so destructive to the flocks that a scarcity of wool was the consequence. Herod took care to have it imported in such quantities, that all his subjects were abundantly supplied for the ensu-

ing winter. These acts of kindness seemed to obliterate his former tyranny, and reconcile his hitherto alienated people; but he soon forfeited the affection thus gained, by relapsing into cruelty and oppression. About this time, Herod married a young lady of great beauty named Mariamne. She was the daughter of Boethus a priest, whom he advanced to the dignity of high priest, in order to render this alliance more suitable to himself: though this honour, which had always been hereditary, was now become of little value; as Herod conferred it on whom he chose, and displaced them at his pleasure.

After this marriage, Herod went on with his buildings; first erecting a magnificent palace for himself, on a hill about seven miles from Jerusalem. In this place he had gained a victory over the Parthians and Jews, when he fled from Jerusalem about seventeen years before, and in memory of that event he called the palace Herodium. The next work he commenced was at Straton's Tower on the sea-coast. Here he constructed a beautiful and safe harbour, and built a city, which he called Cæsarea, in compliment to Augustus. The completion of this work occupied twelve years, and cost large sums of money; but they were well expended, for the place became a celebrated maritime city, which was afterwards the chosen residence of the Roman governors.*

Herod's two sons by Mariamne being now of a suitable age, he sent them to complete their education at Rome: entrusting them to the care of Pollio, a friend of his in that city. But Augustus took the charge of them upon himself, and assigned them apartments in his palace. Herod received farther proofs of favour from the emperor at this time, by having Trachonitis, Auran-

* Acts xxiii. 23.

ia, and Batanea added to his dominions; with full
 power to best the succession to his kingdom in either of
 his sons, as he should choose. The new territory, which
 is situated on the left of the river Jordan between the
 sea of Galilee and Mount Libanus, gave Herod some
 trouble; as Zenodorus the late possessor, who had
 gained it from the Romans, had encouraged a band of
 thieves there, on condition of sharing their plunder. On
 taking possession of the country Herod soon expelled
 the thieves, by which means Zenodorus lost his unlaw-
 ful profits, as well as his farm; and being very angry
 on both accounts, he went to Rome with an accusation
 against Herod. About this time Agrippa the favourite
 of Augustus was appointed to the government of all the
 provinces of the empire to the east of the Egean sea;
 and took up his residence at Mitylene in the Island of
 Lesbos. As soon as Herod heard of his arrival there, he
 went to visit him, and renewed the friendship which had
 formerly subsisted between them. Zenodorus, in the
 meantime, meeting with no success at Rome, returned
 to Gadara, and excited the people of that place to prefer
 a complaint against Herod to Agrippa. The latter how-
 ever not only refused to hear their accusations, but sent
 them in chains to Herod, who had just left him, and in
 whose favour he was more than ever prepossessed.
 Herod on this occasion departed from his usual mode
 of treating his enemies; for he dismissed the Gadarens
 without punishment: thinking to disarm their future
 opposition by his clemency. For some time this had
 the desired effect; but in the following year Augustus
 came into Syria, and then Zenodorus, with some dele-
 gates from Gadara, renewed the accusations, and pre-
 vailed so far as to get a day appointed for Herod to

answer them. He was then at Antioch, and when he entered upon his defence, the favour with which he was treated caused his accusers to despair of succeeding against him; and put them into such fear of being delivered up to him, that they all destroyed themselves to avoid it. Augustus considered this conduct as a proof of their guilt, and consequently acquitted Herod. To make him amends for the trouble they had given him, he farther enlarged his dominions; and appointed him his procurator in Syria. At his request he also bestowed a tetrarchy on Pheroras his brother. In return for all these favours Herod erected a beautiful temple of white marble, in honour of Augustus, near Mount Paneas. This idolatrous flattery, with many other compliances to heathen customs, gave great offence to the Jews. All among them who had any regard for religion were shocked at it; and on his return to Jerusalem general dissatisfaction was expressed on this account. It was in vain for Herod to plead the necessity of conciliating Augustus; his people saw no such necessity; and some of them doubtless reflecting on the glorious privileges conferred on them when the Lord was their sole dependence, contemplated, with grief and shame, the degradation of their present condition.

When Herod found that his excuses were insufficient to appease the national discontent, he proceeded to coercive measures: forbidding all meetings at clubs and feasts; and employing spies to discover all who were any way disaffected towards him. Sometimes he took upon himself this degrading office, and went about the city in disguise, to learn the public opinion. When by these means he gained intelligence of any malcontents he failed not to treat them with great severity: thus

frustrating every attempt against him before it could be put in execution. As a farther means of safety he wished to impose an oath of fidelity on his subjects; but all the Pharisees and Essens refusing to take it, he was obliged to content himself with confining it to such as were suspected of conspiracy.

LETTER XLIX.

IN the nineteenth year of his reign, Herod, having finished Sebaste, and considerably advanced his works at Cæsarea, undertook to rebuild the temple at Jerusalem: hoping thereby to gain the approbation of his subjects; and leave a monument of his own greatness. Nearly five hundred years had elapsed since the dedication of the second temple; and it had suffered not only from the ravages of time, but from those of war in the frequent assaults that had been made on it: so that many parts of it were in a state of decay.

When Herod made known his intention to the Jews, in a general assembly, they expressed their apprehensions lest he should be unable to build a new temple, when he had taken down the old one. To satisfy them on this head, he promised to collect and prepare all the materials before he disturbed the present building; and according to this promise he commenced his preparations immediately: employing a thousand waggons, and ten thousand workmen, under the superintendence of a thousand priests who were skilful in architecture. Every thing needful being thus prepared in two years, the temple was pulled down; and the new one begun. The

completion of this edifice occupied nine years and a half;* but it was still considered as the second temple; because though rebuilt from its foundations, it was not, as formerly, *restored* from a state of desolation; but only *repaired* from a state of decay. The year after Herod undertook this great work, he went into Italy to pay his respects to Augustus, from whom he received his two sons, who had now completed their studies. On his return home he married Alexander the elder to Glaphyra, daughter of Archelaus king of Cappadocia; and Aristobulus to Berenice the daughter of Salome. The personal and mental endowments of these young men, as well as their courteous and agreeable behaviour soon won them the affection and esteem of the Jews. But the jealous fears of Salome were awakened by these favourable sentiments towards them: for she dreaded lest they should avenge the death of their mother, and therefore determined to compass their ruin, as the means of preventing her own.

In the twenty third year of Herod's reign, Agrippa resumed his government of the eastern part of the empire, and in the year following he was involved in a troublesome war against the inhabitants of the Cimmerian Bosphorus. Herod on hearing of this, went to him with a powerful supply, and arrived very opportunely; as his assistance enabled Agrippa to terminate the war by the speedy reduction of the revolters. After this, Herod, accompanying Agrippa to Ephesus, obtained for him a grant of privileges for the Jews who inhabited the several provinces of Asia Minor,† and who were at

* See note Q.

† They were the descendants of those two thousand families planted there by Antiochus the Great.

this time greatly harassed by their heathen neighbours. On his return to Jerusalem, he called an assembly of the people; and having related to them all the success of his expedition, with the benefits obtained for their brethren in Asia Minor, he gave them also a proof of his regard, by remitting one fourth of their taxes, which caused great joy and satisfaction among them. When Alexander and Aristobulus had been three years with their father, the machinations of Salome began to take effect; and they fell under his serious displeasure. They had inadvertently uttered some expressions of resentment against the authors of their mother's death, which by Salome and Pheroras were represented to Herod as threats against him. Snares were continually laid to induce them to speak on this subject; and spies were employed to report what they said, which was repeated to their father with all the aggravations malice could suggest. Herod's jealousy made him an easy dupe to these artifices, and he testified his displeasure towards the young men by sending for Antipater another of his sons, and allowing him those marks of favour which he had hitherto displayed towards them only. Antipater was the son of his first wife Doris, whom he had divorced when he married Mariamne. As Herod had always regarded the sons of the latter as his successors, Antipater had been brought up privately; but when thus called to court he would not lose sight of the crown; and being no less artful than ambitious, he also conspired to effect the ruin of his brothers. Herod's design was to humble the young princes by this measure; but they were only incensed and alienated by it. And as every occasion was sought against them by their enemies, and every accusation greedily received by their

father, the breach became so wide that Herod resolved on taking them into Italy, in order to bring them to trial before Augustus. He accused them of insolent and undutiful conduct towards him ; and of a design to take away his life by poison. The emperor finding no proofs to substantiate the latter charge against the two princes, acquitted them ; and effected a reconciliation between them and their father. Herod on his return having called the people together, related all that had passed at Rome. Then according to the power formerly given him by Augustus he named Antipater as his immediate successor ; and after him Alexander and Aristobulus. Two years elapsed after this without any material occurrence : except that the Jews of Asia and Cyrene, being oppressed by their neighbours, petitioned Augustus for redress ; and obtained from him an edict by which all their former privileges were confirmed, and they were left at liberty to the enjoyment of their own religious and national observances. The peace of Herod's family was not allowed to continue. His brother and sister, still intent on their malicious schemes, continually assailed him with false reports respecting his two sons ; and Antipater, no less intent on securing the crown for himself, seconded their views, to promote his own. These three persons, either by themselves or their agents, tormented the old king with such accounts of plots and conspiracies formed against him, that he could not enjoy a moment's repose by night or by day. In order to discover the alleged treason, he put all the confidants of the young princes to the torture. Some of these having, in extreme suffering, uttered something that implicated Alexander, he was loaded with chains, and cast into prison ; and other persons were tortured to

make farther declarations against him. The young prince, rendered desperate by these violent proceedings, sent his father a pretended confession of treasonable practices, in which he named Salome, Pheroras, and several of Herod's chief friends and ministers as accomplices. This had the effect intended, by creating Herod more jealousy and perplexity than ever: not knowing whom to trust, and conscious of the hatred he merited, he doubted nothing of Alexander's report. Some of the accused he condemned to immediate death, and others expired under the tortures he inflicted to draw confessions from them. In the midst of all his rage and jealousy the real conspirators Salome and Pheroras escaped his vengeance. They had not yet rendered him so miserable as they intended; and they were doubtless reserved to be the instruments of further chastisement to him. At this time, however, their views were defeated by the interposition of Archelaus, the father-in-law of Alexander, who coming to Jerusalem, brought about a reconciliation between Herod and his sons; and once more restored peace in his family. On this second rupture with his sons, Herod had written to Augustus to accuse them of treason, and to demand that they should again be brought to trial; therefore when he was reconciled to them he thought it expedient to go and explain the whole affair to the emperor. During his absence the thieves of Trachonitis committed many depredations in Judea and Cælo-Syria. When on his taking possession of that country he had driven them from all their haunts, they were obliged to have recourse to labour for their subsistence. But this way of living did not accord with their depraved habits; and they only waited for an opportunity to return to their former

pursuits. Accordingly when Herod went to Italy with his sons they had openly revolted, and ravaged the country; but having been overpowered by the king's forces, they had all dispersed except forty of their leaders, who had taken refuge in Arabia Petrea. In this country they were protected by Syllæus the governor under king Obodas, who gave them a fortress called Repta. Herod had excited the enmity of this man by refusing to give him his sister Salome in marriage, unless he became a Jew. Syllæus was unwilling to comply with this condition, for fear of his countrymen; and Salome was consequently given to Alexas one of Herod's friends.

When Herod returned from Rome, his endeavours to suppress the thieves were rendered ineffectual by the encouragement given them by Syllæus. Not being able to get at them in Repta, he put to death all their relations whom he found in Trachonitis. This only rendered the thieves more outrageous, and the object of their inroads being revenge as well as plunder, the country suffered more than ever from their depredations.

Nine years and a half had elapsed since Herod commenced rebuilding the temple; and it being now fit for the celebration of divine service, he appointed a solemn dedication of it to take place on the anniversary of his ascending the throne. Thus the house of the Lord was made ready for his reception on earth: not indeed by one who sought his glory, but by one who in seeking to exalt himself, was unknowingly and unwillingly preparing to receive Him who should suddenly come to his temple; and who was actually presented there in less than four years after this dedication.

The country being still infested by the thieves, Herod

plied to the Roman governor of Syria for redress
inst Syllæus, of whom he also demanded a debt of
y talents due to him. Syllæus, being cited by the
ernor, and the charges proved against him, entered
o a solemn engagement to pay the debt, and give up
fugitives within thirty days. But when that time
d elapsed, instead of complying with these terms he
nt off to Rome. Herod, thus defeated, applied to
e Roman governors for permission to attack the thieves
Repta; and having obtained it, marched thither and
stroyed that fortress: putting to death all the thieves
found there. While he was thus employed, a party
Arabians coming to oppose him, he immediately en-
aged them, and put them to flight, after having killed
acebus their leader, and twenty-five men. When this
as done, Herod returned home; and having placed
ree thousand Idumean guards in Trachonitis, to keep
rder there, he hoped now to remain in peace. New
roubles however assailed him from a quarter where he
east expected them. The late transactions in Arabia
aving been reported to Syllæus at Rome, he went to
Augustus, and informed him that Herod had invaded
he country with a large army, spoiling and destroying
wherever he came; that he had seized a considerable
treasure at Repta, and had slain two thousand five hun-
dred Arabians of the first rank; among whom was Na-
cebus his kinsman. Augustus, believing this account,
was greatly displeased with Herod, and wrote him a
very sharp letter on the subject. Herod sent two suc-
cessive embassies to explain the affair; but the emperor
would not even allow them a hearing. All this coming
to the knowledge of the thieves, they were emboldened
to assemble again; and having overpowered the Idu-

mean guards, they ravaged the country with impunity : while Herod did not dare to march against them, for fear of giving farther offence to Augustus. Herod's domestic affairs at this time were not more prosperous than those of his kingdom : for Salome Pheroras and Antipater took advantage of his perplexities to excite new suspicions against his two sons. Nothing however could be proved, except their intention to leave the kingdom, that they might live in peace elsewhere ; but this sufficed with Herod to confirm all other accusations, and to make him resolve on their destruction. Such was the state of things in Jerusalem, when Herod at length succeeded in regaining the favour of Augustus, to whom by means of a third embassy, he made known the falsehood of Syllæus's report. This and other crimes being proved against Syllæus, Augustus passed sentence of death upon him ; and in order to make amends to Herod, was about to add Arabia Petræa to his dominions. It was at this juncture that Herod wrote to Augustus an account of what had passed in his family ; and begged his permission to proceed against his two sons. On the receipt of Herod's letter, Augustus, considering his age and the troubles of his family, retracted his intention of giving him another kingdom. But he wrote him a kind letter, in which he commiserated his misfortunes, and empowered him to proceed against his sons according to their desert. He advised him to call a council at Berytus, and with the assistance of the Roman governors, Archelaus king of Cappadocia, and others among his friends, to have the matter finally determined. Herod immediately called the council ; but he did not invite Archelaus to be present ; because he feared his partiality towards Alexander, to whom he

was father-in-law. When the council was assembled, Herod brought so many accusations against his sons, and urged them with such vehemence, that the judges, not knowing the arts that had been practised against the accused, concluded they were guilty, and passed sentence of condemnation upon them : leaving the execution of it to their father. This inhuman parent accordingly sent them to Sebaste, and there caused them to be strangled. This is a transaction from which the mind recoils with horror, as not bearing to endure the close contemplation of it. The iniquitous purposes of Salome and her associates were now fully accomplished, and vice was left to triumph. But the triumphs of vice are neither satisfactory nor permanent : for the fearful doom that awaits iniquity is never averted ; though it is sometimes suspended. The faith of God's devoted servants must have been greatly exercised in these times of trouble and rebuke. But to the godly there ariseth up light in the darkness, and the dawn which announced the rising of the Sun of Righteousness was now just beginning to break : for in this year the angel Gabriel appeared to Zecharias in the temple, to foretel the birth of John the Baptist.*

LETTER L.

THE death of Herod's two sons did not put an end to the troubles of his family, which shortly sprung up in a new quarter. His only remaining brother Pheroras, to whom he had always shown great kindness, incurred his displeasure at this time by marrying one of his own

* Luke i. 1—23.

servants. Herod required him to put her away; and he at first consented to do so, engaging himself by an oath. But when the time arrived for the fulfilment of his promise, he thought proper to retract it. Herod was now greatly displeased; and a circumstance which took place at this juncture tended still farther to incense him against his brother. An oath of allegiance to Augustus and the king being again imposed upon the Jews, the Pharisees, as before, refused to take it: alleging that the law* forbade them to acknowledge any sovereign, who was not of the seed of Israel.† Herod sought to punish this refusal of the Pharisees, by imposing a fine on them; but the wife of Pheroras averted the punishment, by paying the whole sum demanded on their behalf.

The reputation of this sect among the people was so great, that they were believed to possess the spirit of prophecy; and on this occasion they asserted their claim to it, by declaring that God had determined to transfer the kingdom from the line of Herod, to that of Pheroras, and the children whom his present wife should bear. Herod's spies, the chief of whom was his sister Salome, soon discovered that seditious discourses and practices were prevalent among the people; and these being traced to their origin, several of the Pharisees were arraigned and put to death. Herod calling a council of his friends at this time, represented to them the state of his affairs; and imputing the disturbances that existed to the machinations of his brother's wife, publicly required him to renounce her, on pain of being renounced by him as a brother. Pheroras declaring that he would rather die, than live without his beloved wife, Herod

* Deuteronomy xvii. 15.

† Yet these very men, when it suited their purpose, could openly declare, "We have no king but Cæsar."

ad him his house; and desired Antipater, Doris, all the members of his own family to have no intercourse with him. Antipater, far from obeying the injunctions of his father, seized the occasion of this breach to conspire against him. He had earned the wages of guilt, when he procured the death of his brothers; but he could not wait to receive them till the term of his father's natural life: he therefore resolved to hasten his death by poison. The resentment of Pheroras even exceeded Herod's displeasure against him, and he readily entered into the views of Antipater. To render their designs as secret as possible, the latter procured an order from Augustus, to attend him at Rome; while Pheroras, who was to be the chief agent in this plot, withdrew to his tetrarchy, making an oath that he would not return again during Herod's life. This unnatural oath he strictly observed; for Herod soon after falling sick, and earnestly desiring to see him, he refused to go. It was well for him that Herod did not follow his example in this respect, for it was not long before he was visited by an illness which terminated in his death; and during that Herod went to him and behaved with great tenderness towards him. After the death of Pheroras, two of his freed men complained to Herod against his widow, whom they accused of having poisoned him. Strict scrutiny being made on this subject, and many persons put to the torture, the plot of Antipater was fully discovered in the course of the investigation. The widow of Pheroras, being sent for by Herod, declared that Antipater had procured the poison and conveyed it to her husband, who had intended to administer it when he should have an opportunity; but who after Herod's kind visit to him had changed his intention, and de-

sired her to destroy it. This testimony being corroborated by several persons who had been employed to procure and convey the poison, the guilt of Antipater was fully proved.

While these events were passing at Jerusalem, the temple of Janus at Rome was closed for the fifth time since its erection. You are doubtless aware that it was kept open during war, and shut only in times of peace. The Romans having at this time *subdued and broken in pieces* the nations of the known world, and established their dominion over them, universal peace was preserved during twelve years. This peace has been considered as introductory to the coming of Christ as the Prince of Peace. But we must remember that though he came to give "peace on earth," it was not earthly peace, nor such "as the world giveth." We must also remember that though outward hostilities were suspended for a time, the internal war occasioned by sin was raging more furiously than ever, and all mankind were engaged in it. St. Paul, while he tells us of the ravages made by it among the Gentiles,* proves that the Jews† also had totally departed from the way of peace. "The fulness of time" was come, not only by the completion of many prophecies, but by the overflowings of ungodliness. The church was ready to exclaim, "Help, Lord, for there is not one godly man left," when the Lord sent forth his Son, made of a woman, according to the first gracious promise,‡ to work out eternal redemption and bring in everlasting righteousness and peace. The virgin who was to bear a son § now had the glad tidings announced to her by the angel Gabriel, who, as you know, declared

* Romans i. 21—32.

† Romans iii. 9—19.

‡ Genesis iii. 15.

§ Isaiah vii. 14.

that he should be the Son of God, and the Saviour of his people *from their sins*. The Virgin Mary dwelt at Nazareth in Galilee; but the prophet Micah had declared that the Messiah should be born in Bethlehem Ephrata, the city of David.* “The prophecies and promises of God will all be accomplished in his own time. Not one of them shall fail.” He *can*, and he *will*, by the course of his Providence, bring to pass events which to weak sighted mortals appear impossible. Let us therefore keep in mind, that with the Lord there is only *one* impossibility. “*He cannot deny himself*,” he cannot, he will not suffer the least of his promises to want its accomplishment. St. Luke tells us how the prophecy of Micah was fulfilled, and the Virgin Mary brought to Bethlehem, when near the time of her delivery, by the decree of Cæsar Augustus.† You now know enough of Herod’s character, to understand why he was *troubled* at the arrival and inquiry of the wise men; and why *all Jerusalem* was troubled with him. The name of a rival, though only just born, was sufficient to alarm his jealous fears. A moment’s reflection might have shown him, that at his advanced age, an infant was not likely to wrest the crown from him; or even were it otherwise, he might have been sure that He who had miraculously announced the birth of the Messiah to distant lands, could also rescue him from the effects of his barbarous policy. Wretched Herod! he had been so long a slave to sin and satan, that incapable of reflection, he was urged by the hard master he served, to the commission of a crime unheard of till then—the murder of all the infants in Bethlehem and its neighbourhood, who were under two years of age. It was about this time that

* Micah v. 2.

† Luke ii. 1—7. See also Note S.

Antipater returned from Rome, not knowing the discovery of his intended parricide. On his arrival in Judea he was arrested, and brought to trial before Quintilius Varus the president of Syria. His guilt being fully proved, he was condemned to death; and that sentence being shortly after confirmed by Augustus, he was executed. Five days after the death of Antipater, died Herod his father, in the seventieth year of his age. The bodily sufferings he endured are dreadful, even in description; but they must have been greatly surpassed by his mental anguish, if his conscience was awakened. The character of this miserable tyrant is too conspicuous to require any comment. Josephus tells us that he preserved it to the last: even on his death-bed framing a project which was truly diabolical. Knowing the hatred of the Jews towards him, and fully persuaded they would rejoice at his death, he sent for the principal men among them, and on their arrival at Jericho, where he then was, caused them all to be put into confinement. When this was done, he exacted a promise from his sister Salome and her husband Alexas that they would cause all these men to be put to death immediately after his decease; in order, as he said, that there might be mourning instead of joy in the kingdom. Salome and Alexas, however, thought it better to break their promise than to execute this horrid plan; and the Jews were accordingly released by them. Herod's kingdom was divided after his death among three of his sons Archelaus, Herod Antipas, and Philip. The former, who is mentioned by St. Matthew,* was deposed about ten years after; the other two are mentioned by St. Luke,† as still reigning when John the Baptist entered on his

* Matthew ii. 22.

† Luke iii. 1.

ministry. Archelaus, who reigned in Judea, was a cruel tyrant; as may be inferred from what St. Matthew says of him. He was at last accused by his own subjects, to Augustus, who cited him to Rome, there to answer the charges preferred against him. Being convicted of all that he was accused of, he was deprived of his kingdom, and sent into banishment. The form of government in Judea was now totally changed; for instead of a kingdom it was reduced to a Roman province under a Roman procurator. Quirinius* the president of Syria was sent by Augustus to take possession of the country, and to settle the affairs of it according to the new constitution. The power of life and death was from this time taken from the Jewish rulers, and vested solely in the Romans; and the taxes were henceforth collected by officers appointed for that purpose, under the new government. These, as you probably know, were the Publicans, who on account of their employment, were held in such detestation by the Jews: for the paying tribute to Cæsar was considered as a breach of their law, and those Jews who collected the tribute were regarded as apostates, who were continually transgressing. Quirinius, while settling the affairs of Judea at this time, deposed Joazar the son of Boethus from the high priesthood, and appointed Annas in his stead.

While these things were doing in Judea, the Lord Jesus Christ came to his temple, about his "Father's business," being then twelve years old, and as St. Luke tells us, endued with such wisdom as caused astonishment in all who heard him. By this his first ministerial visit to his temple many prophecies were fulfilled. Those of Haggai and Malachi, to which I have already

* St. Luke calls him Cyrenius.

referred you, were literally accomplished; and the circumstances of the nation at this time pointed to a remarkable prediction of Jacob,† that the sceptre should not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet till Shiloh should come. The Jews have always understood this prophecy as pointing to the Messiah, yet, though the sceptre was actually departed, and the powers of government taken from them and vested in the hands of strangers, they could not “discern the signs of the times.” Christ the true Shiloh came to his own, and his own received him not. The vail of their hearts,‡ as well as the vail of human traditions had obscured the light of revelation. They did not search, and therefore did not know nor consider those scriptures which testified of Christ, and so fully declared him to be their expected Saviour and King.

Nearly eighteen hundred years have elapsed since the Jews were driven out of their land, and dispersed among the nations; having neither sceptre nor lawgiver among them, nor even a temple to receive their Messiah. Yet, such is their infatuation that they still expect him to appear among them. This can only be accounted for by the blindness mentioned by St. Paul,§ which the same apostle assures us will be taken away, as well as the vail from their hearts. The Old Testament abounds in predictions of their spiritual restoration. Many of these I have already referred you to; and many more I trust you will meet with in studying the blessed word of God. The prophet Isaiah, from his fortieth chapter to the end of his book, continually refers to this subject; and in all parts of the bible where the amplitude of

* Haggai ii. 7, 9. Malachi iii. 1.

† Genesis xlix. 10.

‡ 2 Corinthians iii. 15.

§ Romans xi. 7—11.

Christ's church is predicted, the restoration of God's ancient people is implied; and St. Paul tells us he would not have us to be ignorant of this truth.* I know not how you have felt while reading what I have detailed respecting the Jews, the branches of the olive-tree which have been broken off, "because of unbelief," but I have experienced, while writing to you, an intense anxiety for their being re-ingrafted. In several parts of scripture, the Gentiles are mentioned as those who shall be instrumental in their conversion; and I trust the time is not far distant when exertions suitable to this glorious object will be made by those who have been called out of darkness into the marvellous light of Him who came to be a light to the Gentiles, and the glory of his people Israel. A society has been established in London during several years, by means of which, under God's blessing, many Jews have been brought to the knowledge of the Saviour, not only in England, but in several parts of Europe and Asia. I had lately the pleasure of attending the annual meeting of this society; and was much gratified by hearing that a spirit of inquiry is now manifesting itself among the Jews; and that they readily receive, and frequently *purchase* copies of the Old Testament, in which they read the word of God in its original purity, free from the corruptions and traditions of men. You, I am persuaded, would have been much pleased, had you been with me, to hear thirty-six dear boys who were born of Jewish parents, singing "Hosanna to the Son of David." We are told in scripture that the universal church of Christ will benefit largely by the conversion of the Jews;† let us therefore inquire what we can do towards the advancement of that kingdom which

* Romans xi. 25, 26.

† Romans xi. 12, 15.

is "love, joy, and peace in the Holy Ghost." Let us pray and strive to have it established in our hearts; let us seek to be promoters of it wherever our influence can reach; let us desire and resolve, through grace, to be partakers of it. Then shall we finally obtain an inheritance with the Israel of God; then shall we finally be in sweet pastures, as members of that one great flock under the one Great Shepherd Christ Jesus, who is God over all blessed for ever. Amen.

NOTES.

A.

Divination by arrows, as used by Nebuchadnezzar on this occasion, was performed in the following manner: Several arrows, having the names of the different cities to be assaulted written on them, were put into a quiver, and from thence taken out separately: as is usual in drawing lots. The cities were besieged in the same order as the arrows inscribed with their names were drawn forth. This proceeding of the king of Babylon was foretold to the prophet Ezekiel. See chap. xxi. —22.

B.

The priests were not allowed to mourn excepting for their near relations. The tokens of mourning among the Israelites are expressive of the most poignant grief. "They wept, tore their clothes, smote their breasts, fasted, lay upon the ground, and went bare foot. The time of mourning was commonly seven days; but sometimes this was lengthened or shortened, according to the state or circumstances in which they found themselves. The whole time of their mourning, the near relations of the deceased continued sitting in their houses, and eat upon the ground. Their faces were covered, and all that time they could not apply themselves to any labour. They did not dress themselves, nor make their beds, nor uncover their heads, nor shave themselves, nor cut their nails, nor salute any body." —*Cruden's Concordance*.

C.

The city of Tyre taken by Nebuchadnezzar was situated on the coast of Phœnicia. It was built by some of the people of Zidon, who escaped from that city, when it was taken by the Philistines, about 240 years before the building of Solomon's temple. During the siege, the Tyrians contrived to remove all their wealth to an island about half a mile from the shore; where

they built a new city, which afterwards became as opulent and famous as the old one which was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar. The city on the island was also taken and burned by Alexander the Great, in the year 332 A. C.

D.

"The Jews were very exact in their genealogies, partly from their own choice and interest, that they might preserve the distinctions of the several tribes and families, which was necessary both to make out their claims or titles to offices or inheritances, which might belong to them by death, or otherwise; and to govern themselves thereby in the matter of marriages, and some other things wherein the practice of some laws required the knowledge of these things. It is observed in Ezra ii. 62, that such priests as were not able to produce an exact genealogy of their families, were not permitted to exercise their function. This their exactness was likewise ordered by the special providence of God, that so it might be certainly known of what tribe and family the Messiah was born."—*Cruden's Concordance*.

St. Paul in his epistle to Titus condemns the study of genealogies as unprofitable and vain; and it doubtless has been so since the coming of Christ, however important it was before his appearance in the flesh, as *the seed of Abraham, the Son of the Tribe of Judah*, the horn of salvation raised up for us in the house of David.

E.

The glory of the first temple exceeded that of the second, not only in the costly ornaments with which it was adorned by Solomon (for on the account of them alone it is not likely the pious elders would have wept), but in the manifestations of the Divine Presence, which were withheld after their return from captivity. The Jews reckoned five particulars in which the Glory was departed; namely

1. The ark of the Covenant, and the mercy seat which was upon it; the tables of testimony, &c. which were in it.

2. The Divine Presence which filled the house when Solomon had made an end of praying (See 2 Chron. vii. 1, 2), and which afterwards rested abidingly "in the cloud upon the mercy seat."

3. The Urim and Thummim, which God commanded Moses to put in the breastplate of judgment to be worn by the high priest. (See Exodus xxviii. 15—30. Leviticus viii. 8.)

The words Urim and Thummim signify *light* and *perfection*; in the Septuagint version of the scriptures they are translated *manifestation* and *truth*. What Moses put into the breastplate to be the *tokens* of *light* and *perfection* we are not told. At the use made of it, conveys to our minds a clear intimation that those terms are to be applied not to the breastplate, or any thing put into it, but to the answers which God vouchsafed to his people, when by this his appointed means, they asked counsel of the Lord.

4. The Holy Fire, which "came out from before the Lord" to consume the burnt offering when Aaron and his sons were consecrated; and which again "came down from heaven" when Solomon had made an end of praying, at the dedication of the temple. This fire was carefully maintained by the priests in the tabernacle, and in the first temple. But when the latter was destroyed by the Chaldeans, it was lost; and was never afterwards restored.

5. The Spirit of Prophecy was the fifth manifestation which the Jews lamented as lost. This, however, was not wholly withheld after their return from Babylon: since the prophets Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi prophesied under the second temple.

F.

The four fasts observed by the Jews, in memory of their national calamities, were as follows. The first on the tenth day of the tenth month; being that on which Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to Jerusalem, in the ninth year of king Zedekiah. The second on the ninth day of the fourth month; as the day when the city was taken, in the eleventh year of Zedekiah.

The third on the tenth day of the fifth month; because on that day the city and temple were burned by Nebuzar-adan.

The fourth on the third day of the seventh month, to commemorate the murder of Gedaliah and the desolation of the land which was the consequence of it.

G.

The Jewish year contained twelve lunar months, the first of which was Nisan or Abib, and the last Adar. These months consisted alternately of twenty-nine and thirty days; but as the sum of them fell short of the solar year, another month called Veadar (the second Adar) was added every three years to rectify the difference.

The ancient Hebrews began the year at the autumnal equi-

nox; and this was the time from which their descendants the Jews also reckoned in civil matters. But the period of their departure from Egypt, which was in the month Abib or Nisan* (about the vernal equinox), was thenceforth appointed as the beginning of the year,† and still continues to be observed as such in their ecclesiastical affairs.

H.

The seven counsellors of the kings of Persia were seven of the nobles, who had peculiar privileges above all others. The appointment of them originated in that revolution effected by the seven persian lords who deposed the impostor Smerdis. Darius Hystaspis, one of their number, was elected king of Persia; the rest were admitted to the highest privileges next to the monarch, and from that time the kings of Persia had always seven such counsellors.

I.

The people of Israel were not permitted to make marriages with the Gentiles of any nation whatever, unless they became proselytes to the Jewish religion. Among these proselytes, however, all were not permitted to intermarry with the people of Israel: for the seven nations of Canaan were excluded forever, as were the males of Moab and Ammon; and the Edomites and Egyptians were not admitted to this privilege till the third generation.

The Ammonite and Moabite being mentioned in the masculine gender only, an exception is made on behalf of their women, for the sake of Ruth, who was a Moabitess.

The Jews of the present day, being unable to make these distinctions, intermarry with all who become proselytes.

J.

The service of the synagogues consisted in prayer, reading of the Scriptures, expounding them, and preaching from them.

The prayers anciently used in these assemblies were but eighteen in number, none of which are very long: they are said to have been composed by Ezra and the great synagogue; but the style of them does not resemble that of Ezra, though they are doubtless very ancient. The Jews hold them in great veneration, scarcely allowing the name of prayers to any others.

* Abib signifies *green fruits or ears of corn*; Nisan signifies *spring*.

† Exodus xii. 2.

though they have a great many besides them in their synagogue service. These, and another prayer added by Rabbi Gamaliel, against the Christians, are enjoined to be said three times a day by all persons, either in public or in private.

The reading of the Law and the Prophets has been already adverted to; but there were also three distinct portions of scripture enjoined to be read daily. These were Deuteronomy vi. 4—9. xi. 13—21, and Numbers xv. 37—41. From the first word of the first of them, these selections were called the Shema: they were not, like the eighteen prayers, obligatory on all; but men of free condition were required to read them twice a day, either in public or in private.

The expounding of the scriptures was done at the time of reading them; the preaching to the people from them was performed when the reading and expounding was over.

In the Synagogue of Nazareth, of which our Lord was a member, he read and expounded a part of the prophecy of Isaiah. (See Luke iv. 16.) He also taught in their synagogues, and preached the gospel of the kingdom in all the cities. (See Matthew ix. 35. Luke iv. 44. also Mark i. 39.)

In like manner St. Paul preached to the Jews in their synagogues "after the reading of the Law and the Prophets." (See Acts xiii. 5, 14, 16. xiv. 1. xvii. 1, 2. xviii. 4, 19.)

Divine service was performed in the synagogues twice in the week as well as on the sabbath. Half the weekly portion of the Law and the Prophets was read on each of these days, in the morning only; and the whole was read over again on the sabbath both in the morning and evening, for the benefit of those who could not attend on other days; that they also might hear it twice.

The service of the synagogues was distinct from that of the temple: the latter being the place appointed for the offering of sacrifices and oblations. The ministers also of the synagogues were distinct, not being confined to the tribe of Levi only. All persons, of whatever tribe, who were qualified by learning to instruct others, could officiate in them. For the sake of order, however, each synagogue had some stated ministers who were solemnly appointed to their several offices: they were as follows:

1. The elders or rulers of the synagogue, who superintended all the affairs of it.
2. The minister who offered up the prayers of the congregation; and who was called the Angel of the Church.*

* See Revelations i. 20.

3. The deacons or overseers who had the charge of the books and other things belonging to the synagogue.

4. The interpreter, who rendered the Hebrew text into Chaldee, period by period.

K.

After the Samaritans built their temple on Mount Gerizim, and utterly renounced idolatry, they still differed from the Jews in the following particulars :

1. They received and taught only the five Books of Moses in their synagogues : though it is not certain that they anciently rejected the other scriptures. The discourse of the woman of Samaria would imply that the prophecies relating to the Messiah were known among them.

2. They adhered to the written word of the law ; and rejected all the traditions by which the Jews corrupted it. They were allowed by the Jews themselves to be more strict in their observance of the law than they were. But because in rejecting traditions they agreed with the Sadducees, the Jews have dangerously asserted that they maintain the errors of that sect respecting a future state : whereas they constantly believe and inculcate the doctrine of the Resurrection.

3. The third point of difference was respecting the place where God ought to be worshipped. This was the principal question between the Jews and Samaritans. As soon as the woman of Samaria perceived that our Lord was a prophet she applied to him to settle the controversy ; and in few words stated the arguments used on both sides.* The answer of Christ while it declared that the worship of God was not thenceforth to be confined to any place, utterly discountenanced the schism of the Samaritans. Jerusalem was certainly the place which God had chosen "to put his name there," and in which he had displayed the manifestations of his gracious presence.

The Samaritans therefore departed from the law of God by building the temple on Mount Gerizim ; and this departure led them into another : for in order to justify themselves they corrupted the sacred text, changing the name *Ebal* for *Gerizim* in one place,† and adding the passage of Deuteronomy so corrupted to the twentieth chapter of Exodus, immediately after the Ten Commandments.

L.

The Idumeans or Edomites were the descendants of Esau ; but the country they inhabited was not, after the return of the

* John iv. 20.

† Deuteronomy xxvii. 4—7.

and the same as their ancient allotment, which in the Old Testament is frequently called Mount Seir, and Edom, and such lay between the Lake Asphaltis and the Red Sea. During the Babylonish captivity they were driven out from it by the Arabian Arabs; and they then took up their residence in the northern part of Judea, which lay desolate. The portion of the tribe of Simeon, with part of that of Judah was thenceforth possessed by them, and called by the name of Idumea, of which Marion was the capital. The Edomites after their conquest by John Hyrcanus were incorporated with the Jews, and became entirely one people with them that their distinctive name was wholly lost.

M.

The successors of John Hyrcanus, following his example, obliged all the people whom they conquered to renounce idolatry and worship the true God. Among these proselytes, however, all were not obliged to keep the whole law of God as given by Moses. Some were proselytes of the gate; others were proselytes of justice.

With regard to the former it was considered sufficient that they should renounce idolatry, and live according to prescribed articles, called the seven precepts of the sons of Noah. When they complied with these conditions they were allowed to live among the Jews, and were admitted to worship in the outer court of the temple, called the Court of the Gentiles. In the Old Testament these proselytes of the gate are mentioned as the "mixed multitude," and especially in the fourth Commandment, as the strangers within their gates. Idolators were not permitted to dwell among them; and slaves taken in war who would not thus far become proselytes, were either put to death or sold to other nations.

The proselytes of justice were those who took upon themselves the observance of the whole law, and were in consequence admitted to all the privileges of the Jewish nation; though they were not immediately permitted to intermarry with them.* The Jews did not consider this degree of conformity needful for the Gentiles: yet they gladly received such proselytes; and, as appears from Matthew xxiii. 15, became very zealous to increase their number.

N.

Sects among the Jews were not heard of till long after their return from captivity in Babylon. Under the successors of

* See note I.

Simon the Just a set of men arose who were called Tannaim, or Mishnaical Doctors. These, leaving the pure light of the written word, gave themselves up to the study of traditions, which they pretended were delivered to Moses at the same time as the written law; though many of them were contradictory to it.

As the teachers and observers of these traditions pretended to greater strictness in keeping the law, with their superadded impositions, they imagined themselves to be more holy than other men; and therefore separated from all whom they considered as sinners; refusing even to eat or drink with them. From this exclusive tenet they were called Pharisees: *Pharisei*, in the Hebrew language, signifying to separate. As the number of these men increased, the number of traditions increased also; and in the time of our Lord, they had not only rendered the word of God of none effect through them, but, by continual additions, had caused the bulk of them to exceed that of the Old Testament.*

The real character of the Pharisees is fully exposed by our Lord, in the New Testament: yet so blind were the people, led by these blind guides, that they regarded them with great veneration. They held the poor in utter contempt, calling them *the people of the earth*, and pronouncing them accursed because they knew not the law: though, in fact, their ignorance of it proceeded from the neglect of these their teachers.

The Pharisees believed in a future state of existence; but not in that revealed in scripture. They held and taught the doctrine of a transmigration of souls from one body to another. This accounts for the notions of Herod † and the people ‡ respecting our Lord; and explains the import of that question asked by the disciples, "Who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?" §

* When the number of traditions had so greatly increased, the Jews thought it expedient to write them; and they were accordingly collected into a book called the Mishna. When this was published, all the men of learning among them, both in Judea and Babylonia, wrote comments on it. These, being added to the original compilation, form with it what is now called the Talmud, which the Jews regard with as much veneration as Christians do the bible. The Jerusalem Talmud was published about A. D. 300; the Babylonian Talmud about 200 years after. The latter is now principally studied by the Jews.

† Matthew xiv. 2. ‡ Matthew xvi. 14. Luke ix. 7, 8.
§ John ix. 2.

The Sadducees were at first distinguished from the Pharisees by rejecting all their traditions, and receiving the written word only. But when in process of time they embraced the doctrine of absolute free-will, and denied the need of Divine grace, they became living witnesses to the fallacy of their own tenets, and living censors of their own conduct. For they asserted that man *can* do good without Divine assistance; and yet they not only did evil, but fell into a contradiction of the scriptures, quite as dangerous as the Pharisees' perversion of them; denying the existence of angels, and rejecting the doctrine of a future state altogether. The sect of the Sadducees was the least numerous among the Jews; but it was rendered important by the rank and opulence of those who composed it. When Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans, and the principal men there were put to death, most of the Sadducees being among them, perished at that time; and the sect has not since been in existence.

The Herodians were a sect distinct from the Pharisees and Sadducees. The peculiar tenets by which they seem to have been distinguished were those in which they followed Herod, by yielding to the authority of the Romans,* and complying with many heathen customs, as he did, in order to ingratiate himself with Augustus.

11 The Essens, though not mentioned in the New Testament, were distinct from any of the preceding sects. They enjoined a more strict observance of the law than the Pharisees did; and were more sincere in their obedience to it. They lived apart from the rest of their nation: forming societies to which none were admitted till after a severe and tedious novitiate. Their time was divided between useful labour and devotion; and their lives were spent in a state of peaceful seclusion from the world. They had, however, many useless observances and superstitious contrary to scripture; and, with the exception of their laborious habits, greatly resembled the ascetics of modern times.

12 Since the establishment of christianity, another sect has arisen among the Jews, which is now the only one distinguished from the Pharisees.

13 When the Talmud was published, at the beginning of the sixth century, many of the Jews, shocked at the absurdities they found in it, refused their assent to all the doctrines it con-

* The Pharisees held it unlawful to yield obedience, or pay taxes to a foreign prince; because it was contrary to the injunction in Deuteronomy xvii. 15. In this the Herodians differed from them: holding it to be lawful when it was compulsory.

tained, which were not agreeable to the written word of God in the Old Testament. No public declaration was, however, made by them or their followers till about 150 years after, when Anan a Babylonian Jew, and Saul his son, made a solemn renunciation of all traditions that were not consistent to scripture. This caused an open separation. The declarants were called Karaites, from the word Kara which signifies scripture; but the Pharisees branded them with the name of Sadducees: though, in fact, they resemble the latter only in their rejection of traditions, and not entirely in that point; for they allow such as agree with scripture, and receive them as human helps to the understanding of it, but deny that they are of divine authority, and refuse them that deference which they pay to the written word.

The Karaites are mostly found in the eastern countries; though some of them reside in Poland and Russia. They are, as may be supposed, men of the greatest probity and learning among the Jews: but their number is inconsiderable, being computed at little more than six thousand. They read the scriptures every where in the language of the country where they reside.

O.

Besides the greater and less sanhedrims, the Jews had another court, called the Court of Three. This, like our Court of Chancery, was for the awarding of contested property, &c. according to the rules of equity. But the proceedings in it were neither tedious nor expensive. Each of the litigants fixed on a person to act as judge in the cause; and the two persons thus chosen fixed on a third. The parties pleaded their own cause before these three judges, who gave a speedy and final decision. This court was not affected by the alterations Gabinus made in the government of Judea.

P.

The following Table shows the comparative value of the talent, according to different nations. The talent of silver only is mentioned here; but the value of a talent of gold may be computed by allowing it to be equal to sixteen of silver.

	£	s.	d.
Hebrew Talent . . .	450	0	0
Babylonian Talent . .	240	12	6
Alexandrian Talent . .	450	0	0
Attic Talent	206	5	0
Roman Talent	216	0	0





